N.S.E.
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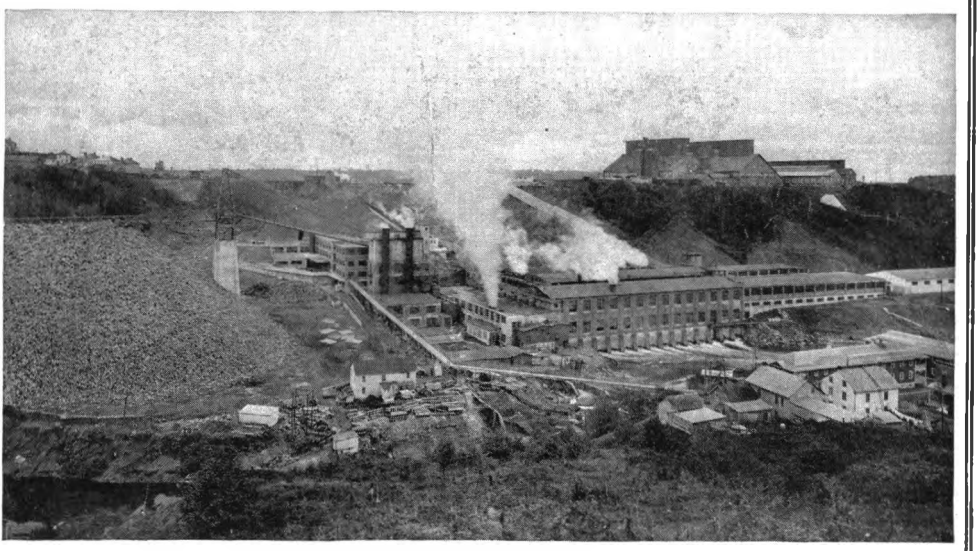
MAY 1922

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

"The Middle of Things"

J. S. Fletcher's greatest mystery story

begins in this issue



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Mrs. Vermilya before she found out about the new discovery. Weight 168 pounds.

Mrs. Vermilya after she applied the new discovery to herself. Weight 128 pounds.

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THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

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A Spirited Novelette

Twelve Memorable Short Stories

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May
1922

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

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No. 1

The Middle of Things

A delightful mystery story, by an author with a very special talent for capturing and holding your interest.

By J. S. FLETCHER

CHAPTER I

ON that particular November evening Viner, a young gentleman of means and leisure, who lived in a comfortable old house in Markendale Square, Bayswater, in company with his maiden aunt Miss Bethia Penkridge, had spent his after-dinner hours in a fashion which had become a habit. Miss Penkridge, a model housekeeper and an essentially worthy woman, whose whole day was given to supervising somebody or something, had an insatiable appetite for fiction, and loved nothing so much as that her nephew should read a novel to her after he and she had adjourned from the dining-room to the hearthrug in the library. Brought up in her youth on Miss Braddon, Wilkie Collins and Mrs. Henry Wood, Miss Penkridge had become a confirmed slave to the sensational. She had no taste for the psychological, and nothing but scorn for the erotic. What she loved was a story which began with crime and ended with detection—a story which kept you wondering who did it, how it was done, and when the doing was going to be laid bare to the light of day.

It was about ten o'clock that evening when Viner read the last page of a novel which had proved to be exactly suited to his aunt's tastes. A dead silence fell on the room, broken only by the crackling of the logs in the grate. Miss Penkridge dropped her knitting on her silk-gowned knees and stared at the leaping flames; her nephew, with an odd glance at her, rose from his easy-chair, picked up a pipe and began to fill it from a tobacco-jar on the mantelpiece. The clock had ticked several times before Miss Penkridge spoke.

"Well!" she said, with the accompanying sigh which denotes complete content. "So he did it! Now, I should never have thought it! The last person of the whole

lot! Clever—very clever! Richard, you'll get all the books that that man has written!"

VINER lighted his pipe, thrust his hands in the pockets of his trousers and leaned back against the mantelpiece.

"My dear aunt!" he said half-teasingly, half-seriously. "You're worse than a drug-taker. Whatever makes a highly-respectable, shrewd old lady like you cherish such an insensate fancy for this sort of stuff?"

"Stuff?" demanded Miss Penkridge, who had resumed her knitting. "Pooh! It's not stuff—it's life! Real life—in the form of fiction!"

Viner shook his head, pityingly.

"Life!" he said. "You don't mean to say that you think those things"—he pointed a half-scornful finger to a pile of novels which had come in from Mudie's that day—"really represent life?"

"What else?" demanded Miss Penkridge.

"Oh—I don't know," replied Viner vaguely. "Fancy, I suppose, and imagination, and all that sort of thing—invention, you know, and so on. But—life! Do you really think such things happen in real life, as those we've been reading about?"

"I don't think anything about it," retorted Miss Penkridge sturdily. "I'm sure of it. I never had a novel yet, nor heard one read to me, that was half as strong as it might have been!"

"Queer thing, one never hears or sees of these things, then!" exclaimed Viner. "I never have!—and I've been on this planet thirty years."

"That sort of thing hasn't come your way, Richard," remarked Miss Penkridge sententiously. "And you don't read the popular Sunday newspapers. I do! They're full of crime of all sorts. So's the world. And as to mysteries—well, I've known of two or three in my time that were much more extraordinary than any I've ever read of in novels. I should think so! Novels—improbability—pooh! Judged by what some people can tell of life, the novel that's improbable hasn't yet been written!"

"Well!" remarked Viner after a pause, "you may be right, Aunt Bethia. Only, you see, I haven't come across the things in life that you read about in novels."

"You may yet," replied Miss Penkridge. "But when anybody says to me of a novel that it's impossible and far-fetched and so on, I'm always inclined to remind him of the old adage that truth *is* stranger than fiction, and that life's full of queer things. Only, as you say, we don't all come across the strange things."

The silvery chime of the clock on the mantelpiece caused Miss Penkridge, at this point, to bring her work and her words to a summary conclusion. Hurrying her knitting into the hand-bag which she carried at her belt, she rose, kissed her nephew and departed bedward; while Viner, after refilling his pipe, proceeded to carry out another nightly proceeding which had become a habit. Every night, throughout the year, he went for a walk before going to bed. And now, getting into an overcoat and pulling a soft cap over his head, he let himself out of the house, and crossing the square, turned down a side-street and marched slowly in the direction of the Bayswater Road. It was an ideal night for the time of year; and on this occasion, therefore, he went farther than usual. And while he strolled along, smoking his pipe, he thought in a half-cynical, half-amused way, of his Aunt Bethia's taste for the sensational fiction and of her evidently sincere conviction that there were much stranger things in real life than could be found between the covers of any novel.

HE was returning to his own Square—but on the opposite side to that by which he had left it, approaching it by one of the numerous long terraces which run out of the main road in the Westbourne Grove district,—when his musings were rudely interrupted. Between this terrace and Markendale Square was a narrow passage, little frequented save by residents, or by such folk familiar enough with the neighborhood to know that it afforded a shortcut. Viner was about to turn into this passage, a dark affair set between high walls, when a young man darted hurriedly out of it, half collided with him, uttered a hasty word of apology, ran across the road and disappeared round the nearest corner. But just there stood a street-lamp, and in its glare Viner caught sight of the hurrying young man's face. And when the retreating footsteps had grown faint, Viner still stood staring in the direction in which they had gone.

"That's strange!" he muttered. "I've seen that chap somewhere—I know him. Now, who is he? And what made him in such a deuce of a hurry?"

It was very quiet at that point. There seemed to be nobody about. Behind him,

far down the long, wide terrace, he heard slow, measured steps—that, of course, was a policeman on his beat. But beyond the subdued murmur of the traffic in the Bayswater Road, Viner heard nothing but those measured steps. And after listening to them for a minute, he turned into the passage out of which the young man had just rushed so unceremoniously.

There was just one lamp in that passage—an old-fashioned affair, fixed against the wall, halfway down. It threw but little light on its surroundings. Those surroundings were ordinary enough. The passage itself was about thirty yards in length. It was inclosed on each side by old brick walls, so old that the brick had grown black with age and smoke. These walls were some fifteen feet in height; here and there they were pierced by doors—the doors of the yards at the rear of the big houses on either side. The doors were set flush with the walls—Viner, who often walked through that passage at night, and who had something of a whimsical fancy, had thought more than once that after nightfall the doors looked as if they had never been opened, never shut. There was an air of queer, cloistral or prisonlike security in their very look. They were all shut now, as he paced down the passage, as lonely a place at that hour as you could find in all London. It was queer, he reflected, that he scarcely ever remembered meeting anybody in that passage.

And then he suddenly paused, pulling himself up with a strange consciousness that at last he was to meet something. Beneath the feeble light of the one lamp Viner saw a man—not a man walking, or standing still, or leaning against the wall, but lying full length across the flagged pavement, motionless—so motionless that at the end of the first moment of surprise, Viner felt sure that he was in the presence of death. And then he stole nearer, listening, and looked down, and drawing his matchbox from his pocket added the flash of a match to the poor rays from above. Then he saw white linen, and a blood-stain slowly spreading over its glossy surface.

CHAPTER II

BEFORE the sputter of the match had died out, Viner had recognized the man who lay dead at his feet. He was a man about whom he had recently felt some curiosity, a man who, a few weeks before, had come to live in a house close to his own, in company with an elderly lady and a pretty girl; Viner and Miss Penkridge had often seen all three in and about Markendale Square, and had wondered who they were. The man looked as if he had seen things in life—a big, burly, bearded man of apparently sixty years of age, hard, bronzed; something about him suggested sun and wind as they are met with in the far-off places. Usually he was seen in loose, comfortable, semi-nautical suits of blue serge; there was a roll in his walk that suggested the sea. But here, as he lay before Viner, he was in evening dress, with a light overcoat thrown over it; the overcoat was unbuttoned and the shirt-front exposed. And on it that sickening crimson stain widened and widened as Viner watched.

Here, without doubt, was murder, and Viner's thoughts immediately turned to two things—one the hurrying young man whose face he thought he had remembered in some vague fashion; the other the fact that a policeman was slowly pacing up the terrace close by. He turned and ran swiftly up the still deserted passage. And there was the policeman, twenty yards away, coming along with the leisureliness of one who knows that he has a certain area to patrol. He pulled himself to an attitude of watchful attention as Viner ran up to him; then suddenly recognizing Viner as a well-known inhabitant of the Square, he touched the rim of his helmet.

"I say!" said Viner in the hushed voice of one who imparts strange and confidential tidings. "There's a man lying dead in the passage round here. And without doubt murdered! There's blood all over his shirt-front."

The policeman stood stock still for the fraction of a second. Then he pulled out his whistle and blew loudly and insistently. Before the shrill call had died away, he was striding towards the passage, with Viner at his side.

"Did you find him, Mr. Viner?" he asked.

"I found him," asserted Viner. "Just now—halfway down the passage!"

"Sure he's dead, sir?"

"Yes! And murdered, too! And—"

He was about to mention the hurrying young man, but they had just then arrived at the mouth of the passage, and the policeman once more drew out his whistle and blew more insistently than before.

"There's my sergeant and an inspector not far off," he remarked. "Some of 'em'll be on the spot in a minute or two. Now, then, sir."

He marched down the passage to the dead man, glanced at the lamp, and turning on his own lantern, directed its light on the body.

"God bless me!" he muttered. "Mr. Ashton!"

"You know him?" said Viner.

"Gent that came to live at Number Seven in your square a while back, Mr. Viner," answered the policeman. "Australian or New Zealander, I fancy. He's gone, right enough, sir! And—knifed! You didn't see anybody about, sir?"

"Yes," replied Viner, "that's just it. As I turned into the passage, I met a young fellow running out of it in a great hurry—he ran into me, and then shot off across the road, Westbourne Grove way. Then I came along and found—this!"

The policeman bent lower and suddenly put a knowing finger on certain of the dead man's pockets.

"Robbed!" he said. "No watch there, anyway, and nothing where you'd expect to find his purse. Robbery and murder—murder for the sake of robbery—that's what it is, Mr. Viner! Westbourne Grove way, you say this fellow went? And five minutes' start!"

"Is it any good getting a doctor?" asked Viner.

"A thousand doctors'll do him no good," replied the policeman grimly. "But—there's Dr. Cortelyon somewhere about here—Number Eleven in the terrace. One of these back doors is his. We might call him."

HE turned the light of his lantern on the line of doors in the right-hand wall, and finding the number he wanted, pulled the bell. As its tinkle sounded somewhere up the yard behind, he thrust his whistle into Viner's hand.

"Mr. Viner," he said, "go up to the end of the passage and blow on that as loud as you can, three times. I'll stand by here till you come back. If you don't hear or see any of our people coming from either direction, blow again."

Viner heard steps coming down the yard behind the door as he walked away. And he heard more steps, hurrying steps, as he reached the end of the passage. He turned it to find an inspector and a sergeant approaching from one part of the terrace, a constable from another.

"You're wanted down here," said Viner as they all converged on him. "There's been murder! One of your men's there—he gave me his whistle to summon further help. This way!"

The police followed him in silence down the passage. Another figure had come on the scene. Bending over the body and closely scrutinizing it in the light of the policeman's lantern was a man whom Viner knew well enough by sight—a tall, handsome man, whose olive-tinted complexion, large lustrous eyes and Vandyke beard gave him the appearance of a foreigner. Yet though he had often seen him, Viner did not know his name; the police-inspector, however, evidently knew it well enough.

"What is it, Dr. Cortelyon?" he asked as he pushed himself to the front. "Is the man dead?"

Dr. Cortelyon drew himself up from his stooping position to his full height—a striking figure in his dress-jacket and immaculate linen. He glanced round at the expectant faces.

"The man's been murdered!" he said in calm, professional accents. "He's been stabbed clean through the heart. Dead? Yes, for several minutes."

"Who found him here?" demanded the officer.

"I found him," answered Viner. He gave a hurried account of the whole circumstances as he knew them, the police watching him keenly. "I should know the man again if I saw him," he concluded. "I saw his face clearly enough as he passed me."

The officer bent down and hastily felt the dead man's pockets.

"Nothing at all here," he said as he straightened himself. "No watch or chain or purse or anything. Looks like robbery as well as murder. Does anybody know him?"

"I know who this gentleman is, sir," answered the policeman to whom Viner had first gone. "He's a Mr. Ashton, who came to live not so long since at Number Seven in Markendale Square, close by Mr. Viner there. I've heard that he came from the Colonies."

"Do you know him?" asked the officer, turning to Viner.

"Only by sight," answered Viner. "I've seen him often, but I didn't know his name. I believe he has a wife and daughter—"

"No sir," interrupted the policeman.

"He was a single gentleman. The young lady at Number Seven is his ward, and the older lady looked after her—sort of a companion."

THE Inspector looked round. Other policemen, attracted by the whistle, were coming into the passage at each end, and he turned to his sergeant.

"Put a man at the top and another at the bottom of this passage," he said. "Keep everybody out. Send for the divisional surgeon— Dr. Cortelyon, will you see him when he comes along? I want him to see the body before its removal. Now, then, about these ladies—they'll have to be told." He turned to Viner. "I understand you live close by them?" he asked. "Perhaps you'll go there with me?"

Viner nodded; and the Inspector, after giving a few more words of instruction to the sergeant, motioned him to follow; together they went down the passage into Markendale Square.

"Been resident here long, Mr. Viner?" asked the Inspector as they emerged. "I noticed that some of my men knew you. I've only recently come into this part myself."

"Fifteen years," answered Viner.

"Do you know anything of this dead man?"

"Nothing—not so much as your constable knows."

"Policemen pick things up. These ladies, now? It's a most unpleasant thing to have to go and break news like this. You know nothing about them, sir?"

"Not even as much as your man knew. I've seen them often—with him, the dead man. There's an elderly lady and a younger one, a mere girl. I took them for his wife and daughter. But you heard what your man said."

"Well, whatever they are, they've got to be told. I'd be obliged if you'd come with me. And then—that fellow you saw running away! You'll have to give us as near a description of him as you can. What number did my man say it was—seven?"

Viner suddenly laid a hand on his companion's sleeve. A smart car, of the sort let out on hire from the more pretentious automobile establishments, had just come round the corner and was being pulled up at the door of a house in the porticoed front of which hung a brilliant lamp.

"That's Number Seven," said Viner. "And—those are the two ladies."

The Inspector stopped and watched. The door of the house opened, letting a further flood of light on the broad step beneath the portico and on the pavement beyond; the door of the car opened too, and a girl stepped out, and for a second or two stood in the full glare of the lamps. She was a slender, lissome young creature, gowned in white, and muffled to the throat in an opera cloak out of which a fresh, girlish face, bright in color, sparkling of eye, crowned by a mass of hair of the tint of dead gold, showed clearly before she rapidly crossed to the open door. After her came an elderly, well-preserved woman in an elaborate evening toilet, the personification of the precise and conventional chaperon. The door closed; the car drove away; the Inspector turned to Viner with a shake of his head.

"Just home from the theater!" he said. "And—to hear this! Well, it's got to be done, Mr. Viner, anyhow."

VINER, who had often observed the girl whom they had just seen with an interest for which he had never troubled to account, found himself wishing that Miss Penkridge was there in his place. He did not know what part he was to play, what he was to do or say; worse than that, he did not know if the girl in whose presence he would certainly find himself within a minute or two was very fond of the man whom he had just found done to death. In that case—but here his musings were cut short by the fact that the Inspector had touched the bell in the portico of Number Seven, and that the door had opened, to reveal a smart and wondering parlor-maid, who glanced with surprise at the Inspector's uniform.

"Hush! This is Mr. Ashton's?" said the Inspector. "Yes—well, now, what is the name of the lady—the elderly lady—I saw come in just now? Keep quiet, there's a good girl,—the fact is, Mr. Ashton's had an accident, and I want to see that lady."

"Mrs. Killenhall," answered the parlor-maid.

"And the young lady—her name?" asked the inspector.

"Miss Wickham."

The Inspector walked inside the house.

"Just ask Mrs. Killenhall and Miss Wickham if they'll be good enough to see Inspector Drillford for a few minutes," he said. Then, as the girl closed the door and turned away up the inner hall, he whispered

to Viner: "Better see both and be done with it. It's no use keeping bad news too long; they may as well know—both."

The parlor-maid reappeared at the door of a room along the hall; and the two men, advancing in answer to her summons, entered what was evidently the dining-room of the house. The two ladies had thrown off their wraps; the younger one sat near a big, cheery fire, holding her slender fingers to the blaze; the elder stood facing the door in evident expectancy. The room itself was luxuriously furnished in a somewhat old-fashioned, heavy style; everything about it betokened wealth and comfort. And that its owner was expected home every minute was made evident to the two men by the fact that a spirit-case was set on the center table, with glasses and mineral waters and cigars; Viner remembered, as his eyes encountered these things, that a half-burned cigar lay close to the dead man's hand in that dark passage so close by.

"Mrs. Killenhall? Miss Wickham?" began Drillford, looking sharply from one to the other. "Sorry to break in on you like this, ladies, but the fact is, there has been an accident to Mr. Ashton, and I'm obliged to come and tell you about it."

VINER, who had remained a little in the background, was watching the faces of the two to whom this initial breaking of news was made. And he saw at once that there was going to be no scene. The girl by the fire looked for one instant at Drillford with an expression of surprise, but it was not the surprise of great personal concern. As for the elder woman, after one quick glance from the officer to Viner, whom she evidently recognized, she showed absolute self-possession.

"A bad accident?" she asked.

Drillford again looked from the elder to the younger lady.

"You'll excuse me if I ask what relation you ladies are to Mr. Ashton?" he said with a significant glance at Mrs. Killenhall.

"None!" replied Mrs. Killenhall. "Miss Wickham is Mr. Ashton's ward. I am Miss Wickham's chaperon—and companion."

"Well, ma'am," said Drillford, "then I may tell you that my news is—just about as serious as it possibly could be."

In the silence that followed, the girl turned toward the visitors, and Viner saw her color change a little. And it was she who first spoke.

"Don't be afraid to tell us," she said. "Is Mr. Ashton dead?"

Drillford inclined his head, and spoke as he was bidden.

"I'm sorry to say he is," he replied. "And still more to be obliged to tell you that he came to his death by violence. The truth is—"

He paused, looking from one to the other, as if to gauge the effect of his words. And again it was the girl who spoke.

"What is the truth?" she asked.

"Murder!" said Drillford. "Just that!"

Mrs. Killenhall, who had remained standing until then, suddenly sat down with a murmur of horror. But the girl was watching the Inspector steadily.

"When was this? and how, and where?" she inquired.

"A little time ago, near here," answered Drillford. "This gentleman, Mr. Viner, a neighbor of yours, found him—dead. There's no doubt, from what we can see, that he was murdered for the sake of robbery. And I want some information about him, about his habits and—"

Miss Wickham got up from her chair and looked meaningly at Mrs. Killenhall.

"The fact is," she said, turning to Drillford, "strange as it may seem, neither Mrs. Killenhall nor myself know very much about Mr. Ashton."

CHAPTER III

FOR the first time since they had entered the room, Drillford turned and glanced at Viner; his look indicated the idea which Miss Wickham's last words had set up in his mind. Here was a mystery! The police instinct was aroused by it.

"You don't know very much about Mr. Ashton?" he said, turning back to the two ladies. "Yet—you're under his roof? This is his house, isn't it?"

"Just so," assented Miss Wickham. "But when I say we don't know much, I mean what I say. Mrs. Killenhall has only known Mr. Ashton a few weeks, and until two months ago I had not seen Mr. Ashton for twelve years. Therefore neither of us can know much about him."

"Would you mind telling me what you do know?" asked Drillford. "We've got to know something—who he is, and so on."

"All that I know is this," replied Miss

Wickham. "My father died in Australia, when I was about six years old. My mother was already dead, and my father left me in charge of Mr. Ashton. He sent me, very soon after my father's death, to school here in England, where I've remained for twelve years. About two months ago Mr. Ashton came to England, took this house, fetched me from school and got Mrs. Killenhall to look after me. Here we've all been ever since—and beyond that I know scarcely anything."

DRILLFORD looked at the elder lady. "I know, practically, no more than Miss Wickham has told you," said Mrs. Killenhall. "Mr. Ashton and I got in touch with each other through his advertisement in the Morning *Post*. We exchanged references, and I came here."

"Ah!" said Drillford. "And what might his references be, now?"

"To his bankers, the London and Orient, in Threadneedle Street," answered Mrs. Killenhall promptly. "And to his solicitors, Crawle, Pawle and Rattenbury, of Bedford Row."

"Very satisfactory they were, no doubt, ma'am?" suggested Drillford.

Mrs. Killenhall let her eye run round the appointments of the room.

"Eminently so," she said dryly. "Mr. Ashton was a very wealthy man."

Drillford pulled out a pocketbook and entered the names which Mrs. Killenhall had just mentioned.

"The solicitors will be able to tell something," he murmured as he put the book back. "We'll communicate with them first thing in the morning. But just two questions before I go. Can you tell me anything about Mr. Ashton's usual habits? Had he any business? What did he do with his time?"

"He was out a great deal," said Mrs. Killenhall. "He used to go down to the City. He was often out of an evening. Once, since I came here, he was away for a week in the country—he didn't say where. He was an active man—always in and out. But he never said much as to where he went."

"The other question," said Drillford, "is this: Did he carry much on him in the way of valuables or money? I mean—as a rule?"

"He wore a very fine gold watch and chain," answered Mrs. Killenhall; "and as for money—well, he always seemed to have a lot in his purse. And he wore two diamond rings—very fine stones."

"Just so!" murmured Drillford. "Set upon for the sake of those things, no doubt. Well, ladies, I shall telephone to Crawle's first thing in the morning, and they'll send somebody along at once, of course. I'm sorry to have brought you such bad news, but—"

He turned toward the door; Miss Wickham stopped him.

"Will Mr. Ashton's body be brought here—tonight?" she asked.

"No," replied Drillford. "It will be taken to the mortuary. If you'll leave everything to me, I'll see that you are spared as much as possible. Of course, there'll have to be an inquest—but you'll hear all about that tomorrow. Leave things to us and to Mr. Ashton's solicitors."

He moved towards the door, and Viner, until then a silent spectator, looked at Miss Wickham, something impelling him to address her instead of Mrs. Killenhall.

"I live close by you," he said. "If there is anything that I can do, or that my aunt Miss Penkridge, who lives with me, can do? Perhaps you will let me call in the morning."

The girl looked at him steadily and frankly.

"Thank you, Mr. Viner," she said. "It would be very kind if you would. We've no menfolk—yes, please do."

"After breakfast, then," answered Viner, and went away to join the Inspector, who had walked into the hall.

"What do you think of this matter?" he asked, when they had got outside the house.

"Oh, a very clear and ordinary case enough, Mr. Viner," replied Drillford. "No mystery about it at all. Here's this Mr. Ashton been living here some weeks—some fellow, the man, of course, whom you saw running away, has noticed that he was a very rich man and wore expensive jewelry, has watched him, probably knew that he used that passage as a shortcut, and has laid in wait for him and murdered him for what he'd got on him. It wouldn't take two minutes to do the whole thing. Rings, now! They spoke of diamond rings, in there. Well, I didn't see any diamond rings on his hands when I looked at his body, and I particularly noticed his hands, to see if there were signs of any struggle. No sir—it's just a plain case of what used to be called highway robbery and murder. But come round with me to the police-sta-

tion, Mr. Viner—they'll have taken him to the mortuary by now, and I should like to hear what our divisional surgeon has to say, and what our people actually found on the body."

AS Viner and the Inspector walked into the police-station, Dr. Cortelyon came out. Drillford stopped him.

"Found anything more, Doctor?" he asked.

"Nothing beyond what I said at first," replied Cortelyon. "The man has been stabbed through the heart, from behind, in one particularly well-delivered blow. I should say the murderer had waited for him in that passage, probably knowing his habits. That passage, now—you know it really will have to be seen to! That wretched old lamp in the middle gives no light at all. The wonder is that something of this sort hasn't occurred before."

Drillford muttered something about local authorities and property-owners and went forward into an office, motioning Viner to follow. The divisional surgeon was there, in conversation with the sergeant whom Drillford had left in charge of the body. "That is something on which I'd stake my professional reputation," he said. "I'm sure of it."

"What's that, Doctor?" asked Drillford. "Something to do with this affair?"

"I was saying that whoever stabbed this unfortunate man had some knowledge of anatomy," remarked the Doctor. "He was killed by one swift blow from a particularly keen-edged, thin-bladed weapon which was driven through his back at the exact spot. You ought to make a minute search behind the walls on either side of that passage—the probability is that the murderer threw his weapon away."

"We'll do all that, Doctor," said Drillford. "As to your suggestion—don't you forget that there are a good many criminals here in London who are regular experts in the use of the knife—I've seen plenty of instances of that myself. Now," he went on, turning to the sergeant, "about that search? What did you find on him?"

The sergeant lifted the lid of a desk and pointed to a sheet of foolscap paper whereon lay certain small articles at which Viner gazed with a sense of strange fascination. A penknife, a small gold match-box, a gold-mounted pencil-case, some silver coins, a handkerchief, and conspicuous among the rest, a farthing.

"That's the lot," said the sergeant, "except another handkerchief and a pair of gloves in the overcoat, where I've left them. Nothing else—no watch, chain, purse or pocketbook. And no rings—but it's very plain from his fingers that he wore two rings—one on each hand, third finger in each case."

"There you are!" said Drillford with a glance at Viner. "Murdered and robbed—clear case! Now, Mr. Viner, give us as accurate a description as possible of the fellow who ran out of that passage?"

VINER did his best. His recollections were of a young man of about his own age, about his own height and build, somewhat above the medium; it was his impression, he said, that the man was dressed, if not shabbily, at least poorly; he had an impression, too, that the clean-shaven face which he had seen for a brief moment was thin and worn.

"Got any recollection of his exact look?" inquired the Inspector. "That's a lot to go by."

"I'm trying to think," said Viner. "Yes—I should say he looked to be pretty hard-up. There was a sort of desperate gleam in his eye. And—"

"Take your time," remarked Drillford. "Anything you can suggest, you know—"

"Well," replied Viner. "I'd an idea at the moment, and I've had it since, that I'd seen this man before. Something in his face was familiar. The only thing I can think of is this: I potter round old bookshops and curiosity-shops good deal—I may have seen this young fellow on some occasion of that sort."

"Anyway," suggested Drillford, glancing over the particulars which he had written down, "you'd know him again if you saw him?"

"Oh, certainly!" asserted Viner. "I should know him anywhere."

"Then that's all we need trouble you with now, sir," said Drillford. "The next business will be—tomorrow."

Viner walked slowly out of the police-station and still more slowly homeward. When he reached the first lamp, he drew out his watch. Twelve o'clock! Just two hours ago he had been in his own comfortable library, smiling at Miss Penkridge's ideas about the very matters into one of which he was now plunged. He would not have been surprised if he had suddenly awoke, to find that all this was a

bad dream, induced by the evening's conversation. But just then he came to the passage in which the murder had been committed. A policeman was on guard at the terrace end—and Viner, rather than hear any more of the matter, hastened past him and made a circuitous way to Markendale Square.

He let himself into his house as quietly as possible, and contrary to taste and custom, went into the dining-room, switched on the electric light and helped himself to a stiff glass of brandy and soda at the sideboard. When the mixture was duly prepared, he forgot to drink it. He stood by the sideboard, the glass in his hand, his eyes staring at vacancy. Nor did he move when a very light foot stole down the stairs, and Miss Penkridge, in wraps and curl-papers, looked round the side of the door.

"Heavens above, Richard!" she exclaimed. "What is the matter! I wondered if you were burglars! Half-past twelve!"

Viner suddenly became aware of the glass which he was unconsciously holding. He lifted it to his lips, wondering whatever it was that made his mouth feel so dry. And when he had taken a big gulp, and then spoke, his voice—to himself—sounded just as queer as his tongue had been feeling.

"You were right!" he said suddenly. "There are queerer, stranger affairs in life than one fancies! And I—I've been pitchforked—thrown—clean into the middle of things! I—"

Miss Penkridge came closer to him, staring. She looked from him to the glass, from the glass to him.

"No—I haven't been drinking," said Viner with a harsh laugh. "I'm drinking now, and I'm going to have another, too. Listen!"

HE pushed her gently into a chair, and seating himself on the edge of the table, told her the adventure. And Miss Penkridge, who was an admirable listener to fictitious tales of horror, proved herself no less admirable in listening to one of plain fact, and made no comment until her nephew had finished.

"That poor man!" she said at last. "Such a fine, strong, healthy-looking man, too! I used to wonder about him, when I saw him in the square, I used to think of him as somebody who'd seen things!"

Viner made a sudden grimace.

"Don't!" he said. "Ugh! I've seen things tonight that I never wished to see! And I wish—"

"What?" demanded Miss Penkridge after a pause, during which Viner had sat staring at the floor.

"I wish to God I'd never seen that poor devil who was running away!" exclaimed Viner with sudden passion. "They'll catch him, and I shall have to give evidence against him, and my evidence'll hang him, and—"

"There's a lot to do, and a lot'll happen before that comes off, Richard," interrupted Miss Penkridge. "The man may be innocent."

"He'd have a nice job to prove it!" said Viner with a forced laugh. "No, if the police get him—besides, he was running straight from the place! Isn't it a queer thing?" he went on, laughing again. "I don't mind remembering the—the dead man, but I hate the recollection of that chap hurrying away! I wonder what it feels like when you've just murdered another fellow, to slink off like—"

"You've no business to be wondering any such thing!" said Miss Penkridge sharply. "Here—get yourself another brandy and soda, and let us talk business. These two women—did they feel it much?"

"They puzzled me," replied Viner. He took his aunt's advice about the extra glass, and obeyed her, too, when she silently pointed to a box of cigars which lay on the sideboard. "All right," he said after a minute or two. "I'm not going to have nerves. What was I saying? They puzzled me? Yes, puzzled, especially the girl; she seemed so collected about everything. And yet, according to her own story, she's only just out of the schoolroom. You'll go round there with me?"

"If we can be of any service to them, certainly," assented Miss Penkridge.

"The girl said they'd no menfolks," remarked Viner.

"In that case I shall certainly go," said Miss Penkridge. "Now, Richard, smoke your cigar, and think no more about all this till tomorrow."

Viner flung himself into an easy-chair.

"All right!" he said. "Don't bother! It's been a bit of a facer, but—"

He was astonished when he woke next morning, much later than was his wont, to find that he had not dreamed about the events of the midnight. And he was his

usual practical and cool-headed self when, at eleven o'clock, he stood waiting in the hall for Miss Penkridge to go round with him to Number Seven. But the visit was not to be paid just then—as they were about to leave the house, a police-officer came hurrying up and accosted Viner. Inspector Drillford's compliments, and would Mr. Viner come round? And then the messenger gave a knowing grin.

"We've got the man, sir!" he whispered. "That's why you're wanted."

CHAPTER IV

VINER was hoping that the police had got hold of the wrong man as he reluctantly walked into Drillford's office, but one glance at the Inspector's confident face, alert and smiling, showed him that Drillford himself had no doubts on that point.

"Well, Mr. Viner," he said with a triumphant laugh, "we haven't been so long about it, you see! Much quicker work than I'd anticipated, too."

"Are you sure you've got the right man?" asked Viner. "I mean—have you got the man I saw running away from the passage?"

"You shall settle that yourself," answered Drillford. "Come this way."

He led Viner down a corridor, through one or two locked doors, and motioning him to tread softly, drew back a sliding panel in the door of a cell and silently pointed. Viner stole up and looked through the barred opening. One glance at the man sitting inside the cell, white-faced, staring at the drab, bare wall, was enough; he turned to Drillford and nodded. Drillford nodded too, and led him back to the office.

"That's the man I saw," said Viner.

"Of course!" assented Drillford. "I'd no doubt of it. Well, it's been a far simpler thing than I'd dared to hope. I'll tell you how we got him. This morning, about ten o'clock, this chap, who wont give his name, went into the pawnbroker's shop in Edgeware Road, Pelver's, and asked for a loan on a diamond ring which he produced. Now, Pelver, who happened to attend to him himself, is a good deal of an expert in diamonds—he's a jeweler as well as a pawnbroker, and he saw at once that the diamond in this ring was well worth all of a thousand pounds—a gem of the first water! He was therefore considerably astonished when his customer asked for a loan of ten pounds on it—still more so when the fellow suggested that Pelver should buy it outright for twenty-five. Pelver asked him some questions as to his property in the ring and he made some excuses about its having been in his family for some time, and that he would be glad to realize on it. Under the pretense of examining it, Pelver took the ring to another part of the shop and quietly sent for a policeman. And the end was, this officer brought the man here, and Pelver with him, and the ring. Here it is!"

He opened a safe and produced a diamond ring at which Viner stared with feelings for which he could scarcely account.

"How do you know that's one of Mr. Ashton's rings?" he asked.

"Oh, I soon solved that!" laughed Drillford. "I hurried round to Markendale Square with it at once. Both the ladies recognized it—Mr. Ashton had often shown it to them, and told them its value, and there's a private mark of his inside it. And so we arrested him, and there he is! Clear case!"

"What did he have to say about it?" asked Viner.

"He's a curious customer," replied Drillford. "I should say that whatever he is now, he has been a gentleman. He was extremely nervous and so on while we were questioning him about the ring, but when it came to the crucial point, and I charged him and warned him, he turned strangely cool. I'll tell you what he said, in his exact words. 'I'm absolutely innocent of that!' he said. 'But I can see that I've placed myself in a very strange position.' And after that he would say no more—he hasn't even asked to see a solicitor."

"What will be done next?" asked Viner.

"He'll be brought before the magistrate in an hour or two," said Drillford. "Formal proceedings—for a remand, you know. I shall want you there, Mr. Viner; it wont take long. I wish the fellow would tell us who he is."

"And I wish I could remember where and when I have seen him before!" exclaimed Viner.

"Ah, that's still your impression?" remarked Drillford. "You're still convinced of it?"

"More than ever—since seeing him just now," affirmed Viner. "I know his face, but that's all I can say. I suppose," he

continued, looking diffidently at the Inspector, as if he half-expected to be laughed at for the suggestion he was about to make, "I suppose you don't believe that this unfortunate fellow may have some explanation of his possession of Mr. Ashton's ring?"

Drillford, who had been replacing the ring in a safe, locked the door upon it with a snap, and turned on his questioner with a look which became more and more businesslike and official with each succeeding word.

"Now, Mr. Viner," he said, "you look at it from our point of view. An elderly gentleman is murdered and robbed. A certain man is seen—by you, as it happens—running away as fast as he can from the scene of the murder. Next morning that very man is found trying to get rid of a ring which, without doubt, was taken from the murdered man's finger. What do you think? Or—another question—what could we, police officials, do?"

"Nothing but what you're doing, I suppose," said Viner. "Still—there may be a good deal that's—what shall I say?—behind all this."

"It's for him to speak," observed Drillford, nodding in the direction of the cells. He's got a bell within reach of his fingers; he's only got to ring it and to ask for me or any solicitor he likes to name. But—we shall see!"

NOTHING had been seen or heard, in the way hinted at by Drillford, when, an hour later, Viner, waiting in the neighboring police-court, was aware that the humdrum, sordid routine was about to be interrupted by something unusual. The news of an arrest in connection with the Lonsdale Passage murder had somehow leaked out, and the court was packed to the doors—Viner himself had gradually been forced into a corner near the witness-box in which he was to make an unwilling appearance. And from that corner he looked with renewed interest at the man who was presently placed in the dock, and for the hundredth time asked himself what it was in his face that woke some chord of memory in him.

There was nothing of the criminal in the accused man's appearance. Apparently about thirty years of age, spare of figure, clean-shaven, of a decidedly intellectual type of countenance, he looked like an actor. His much-worn suit of tweed was well cut and had evidenty been carefully kept, in spite of its undoubtedly threadbare condition. It, and the worn and haggard look of the man's face, denoted poverty, if not recent actual privation, and the thought was present in more than one mind there in possession of certain facts: if this man had really owned the ring which he had offered to the pawnbroker, why had he delayed so long in placing himself in funds through its means? For if his face expressed anything, it was hunger.

VINER, who was now witnessing police-court proceedings for the first time in his life, felt an almost morbid curiosity in hearing the tale unfolded against the prisoner. For some reason, best known to themselves, the police brought forward more evidence than was usual on first proceedings before a magistrate. Viner himself proved the finding of the body; the divisional surgeon spoke as to the cause of death; the dead man's solicitor testified to his identity and swore positively as to the ring; the pawnbroker gave evidence as to the prisoner's attempt to pawn or sell the ring that morning. Finally, the police proved that on searching the prisoner after his arrest, a knife was found in his hip-pocket which, in the opinion of the divisional surgeon, would have caused the wound found in the dead man's body. From a superficial aspect, no case could have seemed clearer.

But in Viner's reckoning of things there was mystery. Two episodes occurred during the comparatively brief proceedings which made him certain that all was not being brought out. The first was when he himself went into the witness-box to prove his discovery of the body and to swear that the prisoner was the man he had seen running away from the passage. The accused glanced at him with evident curiosity as he came forward; on hearing Viner's name, he looked at him in a strange manner, changed color and turned his head away. But when a certain question was put to Viner, he looked round again, evidently anxious to hear the answer.

"I believe you thought, on first seeing him, that the prisoner's face was familiar to you, Mr. Viner?"

"Yes—I certainly think that I have seen him before, somewhere."

"You can't recollect more? You don't know when or where you saw him?"

"I don't. But that I have seen him,

perhaps met him, somewhere, I am certain."

This induced the magistrate to urge the accused man—who had steadfastly refused to give name or address—to reveal his identity. But the prisoner only shook his head.

"I would rather not give my name at present," he answered. "I am absolutely innocent of this charge of murder, but I quite realize that the police are fully justified in bringing it against me. I had nothing whatever to do with Mr. Ashton's death—nothing! Perhaps the police will find out the truth; and meanwhile I had rather not give my name."

"You will be well advised to reconsider that," said the magistrate. "If you are innocent, as you say, it will be far better for you to say who you are, and to see a solicitor. As things are, you are in a very dangerous position."

But the prisoner shook his head.

"Not yet, at any rate," he answered. "I want to hear more."

WHEN the proceedings were over and the accused, formally remanded for a week, had been removed to the cells previous to being taken away, Viner went round to Drillford's office.

"Look here!" he said abruptly, finding the Inspector alone, "I dare say you think I'm very foolish, but I don't believe that chap murdered Ashton. I don't believe it for one second!"

Drillford, who was filling up some papers, smiled.

"No?" he said. "Now, why, Mr. Viner?"

"You can call it intuition if you like," answered Viner. "But I don't! And I shall be surprised if I'm not right. There are certain things that I should think would strike you."

"What, for instance?" asked Drillford.

"Do you think it likely that a man who must have known that a regular hue and cry would be raised about that murder, would be such a fool as to go and offer one of the murdered man's rings within a mile of the spot where the murder took place?" asked Viner.

Drillford turned and looked steadily at his questioner.

"Well, but that's precisely what he did, Mr. Viner!" he exclaimed. "There's no doubt whatever that the ring in question was Ashton's; there's also no doubt that this man did offer it to Pelver this morning. Either the fellow is a fool or singularly ignorant, to do such a mad thing! But—he did it! And I know why."

"Why, then?" demanded Viner.

"Because he was just starving," answered Drillford. "When he was brought in here, straight from Pelver's, he hadn't a halfpenny on him, and in the very thick of my questionings—and just think how important they were!—he stopped me. 'May I say a word that's just now much more important to me than all this?' he said. 'I'm starving! I haven't touched food or drink for nearly three days. Give me something, if it's only a crust of bread!' That's fact, Mr. Viner."

"What did you do?" inquired Viner.

"Got the poor chap some breakfast, at once," answered Drillford, "and let him alone till he'd finished. Have you ever seen a starved dog eat? No—well, I have, and he ate like that—he was ravenous! And when a man's at that stage, do you think he's going to stop at anything? Not he! This fellow, you may be sure, after killing and robbing Ashton, had but one thought—how soon he could convert some of the property into cash, so that he could eat. If Pelver had made him that advance, or bought the ring, he'd have made a bee-line for the nearest coffee-shop. I tell you he was mad for food!"

"Another thing," said Viner. "Where is the rest of Mr. Ashton's property—his watch, chain, the other ring, his purse, and—wasn't there a pocketbook? How is it this man wasn't found in possession of them?"

"Easy enough for him to hide all those things, Mr. Viner," said Drillford, with an indulgent smile. "What easier? You don't know as much of these things as I do—he could quite easily plant all those articles safely during the night. He just stuck to the article which he could most easily convert into money."

"Well, I don't believe he's guilty," repeated Viner. "And I want to do something for him. You may think me quixotic, but I'd like to help him. Is there anything to prevent you from going to him, telling him that I'm convinced of his innocence and that I should like to get him help—legal help?"

"There's nothing to prevent it, to be sure," answered Drillford. "But Mr. Viner, you can't get over the fact that this fellow had Ashton's diamond ring in his possession!"

"How do I—how do you—know how he came into possession of it?" demanded Viner.

"And then—that knife!" exclaimed Drillford. "Look here! I've got it. What sort of thing is that for an innocent, harmless man to carry about him? It's an American bowie-knife!"

He opened a drawer and exhibited a weapon which, lying on a pile of paper, looked singularly suggestive and fearsome.

"I don't care!" said Viner with a certain amount of stubbornness. "I'm convinced that the man didn't kill Ashton. And I want to help him. I'm a man of considerable means, and in this case—well, that's how I feel about it."

Drillford made no answer. But presently he left the room, after pointing Viner to a chair. Viner waited—five, ten minutes. Then the door opened again, and Drillford came back. Behind him walked the accused man, with a couple of policemen in attendance upon him.

"There, Mr. Viner!" said Drillford. "You can speak to him yourself!"

Viner rose from his chair. The prisoner stepped forward, regarding him earnestly.

"Viner!" he said, in a low, concentrated tone, "don't you know me? I'm Langton Hyde! You and I were at Rugby together. And—we meet again, here!"

CHAPTER V

AT these words Viner drew back with an exclamation of astonishment, but in the next instant he stepped forward again, holding out his hand.

"Hyde!" he said. "Then—that's what I remembered! Of course I know you! But good heavens, man, what does all this mean? What's brought you to this—to be here, in this place?"

The prisoner looked round at his captors, and back at Viner, and smiled as a man smiles who is beginning to realize hopelessness to the full.

"I don't know if I'm allowed to speak," he said.

Drillford, who had been watching this episode with keen attention, motioned to the two policemen.

"Wait outside," he said abruptly. "Now, then," he continued when he, Viner and Hyde were alone, "this man can say anything he likes to you, Mr. Viner, so long as you've asked to see him. This is all irregular, but I've no wish to stop him from telling you whatever he pleases. But remember," he went on, glancing at the prisoner, "you're saying it before me—and in my opinion, you'd a deal better have said something when you were in court just now."

"I didn't know what to say," replied Hyde doubtfully. "I'm pretty much on the rocks, as you can guess; but—I have relatives! And if it's possible, I don't want them to know about this."

Drillford looked at Viner and shook his head, as if to signify his contempt of Hyde's attitude.

"Considering the position you're in," he said, turning again to Hyde, "you must see that it's impossible that your relations should be kept from knowing. You'll have to give particulars about yourself, sooner or later. And charges of murder, like this, can't be kept out of the newspapers."

"Tell me, Hyde!" exclaimed Viner. "Look here, now, to begin with—you didn't kill this man?"

Hyde shook his head in a puzzled fashion—something was evidently causing him surprise.

"I didn't know the man was killed, or dead, until they brought me here, from that pawnbroker's this morning!" he said. Then he laughed almost contemptuously, and with some slight show of spirit. "Do you think I'd have been such a fool as to try to pawn or sell a ring that belonged to a man who'd just been murdered?" he demanded. "I'm not quite such an ass as that!"

Viner looked round at Drillford.

"There!" he said quietly. "What did I tell you? Isn't that what I said? You're on the wrong track, Inspector!"

But Drillford, sternly official in manner, shook his head.

"How did he come by the ring, then?" he asked, pointing at his prisoner. "Let him say!"

"Hyde!" said Viner. "Tell! I've been certain for an hour that you didn't kill this man, and I want to help you. But—tell us the truth! What do you know about it? How did you get that ring?"

"I shall make use of anything he tells," remarked Drillford warningly.

"He's going to tell—everything," said Viner. "Come now, Hyde, the truth!"

Hyde suddenly dropped into a chair by which he was standing, and passed his

hand over his face with a gesture which seemed to indicate a certain amount of bewilderment.

"Let me sit down," he said. "I'm weak, tired, too. Unt.l this morning I hadn't had a mouthful of food for a long time, and I'd—well, I'd been walking about, night as well as day. I was walking about all yesterday, and a lot of last night. I'm pretty nearly done, if you want to know!"

"Take your time," said Drillford. "Here, wait a bit," he went on after a sudden glance at his prisoner. "Keep quiet a minute." He turned to a cupboard in the corner of the room and presently came back with something in a glass. "Drink that," he said not unkindly. "Drop of weak brandy and water," he muttered to Viner. "Do him no harm—I see how it is with him—he's been starving."

HYDE caught the last word and laughed feebly as he handed the glass back.

"Starving!" he said. "Yes—that's it! I hope neither of you'll know what it means! Three days without—"

"Now, Hyde!" interrupted Viner. "Never mind that—you wont starve again. Come—tell us all about this—tell everything."

Hyde bent forward in his chair, but after a look at the two men, his eyes sought the floor and moved from one plank to another as if he found it difficult to find a fixed point.

"I don't know where to begin, Viner," he said at last. "You see, you've never met me since we left school. I went in for medicine—I was at Bart's for a time, but—well, I was no good, somehow. And then I went in for the stage—I've had some fairly decent engagements, both here and in the States, now and then. But you know what a precarious business that is. And sometime ago I struck a real bad patch, and I've been out of a job for months. And lately it's gone from bad to worse—you know, or rather I suppose you don't know, because you've never been in that fix—pawning everything, and so on, until—well, I haven't had a penny in my pockets for days now!"

"Your relations?" questioned Viner.

"Didn't want them to know," answered Hyde. "The fact is, I haven't been on good terms with them for a long time, and I've got some pride left—or I had, until yesterday. But here's the truth: I had to clear out of my lodgings—which was nothing but an attic, three days since, and I've been wandering about, literally hungry and homeless, since that. If it hadn't been for that, I should never have been in this hole! And that's due to circumstances that beat me, for I tell you again, I don't know anything about this man's murder—at least, not about it actually."

"What do you know?" asked Viner. "Tell us plainly."

"I'm going to," responded Hyde. "I was hanging about the Park and around Kensington Gardens most of yesterday. Then, at night, I got wandering about this part—didn't seem to matter much where I went. You don't know, either of you, what it means to wander round, starving. You get into a sort of comatose state—you just go on and on. Well, last night I was walking, in that way, in and out about these Bayswater squares. I got into Markendale Square. As I was going along the top side of it, I noticed a passage and turned into it—as I've said, when a man's in the state I was in, it doesn't matter where he slouches—anywhere! I turned into that passage, I tell you, just aimlessly, as a man came walking out. Viner, look for that man! Find him! He's the fellow these police want! If there's been murder—"

"Keep calm, Hyde!" said Viner. "Go on, quietly."

"This man passed me and went on into the square," continued Hyde. "I went up the passage. It was very dark, except in the middle, where there's an old-fashioned lamp. And then I saw another man, who was lying across the flags. I don't know that I'd any impression about him—I was too sick and weary. I believe I thought he was drunk, or ill or something. But you see, at the same instant that I saw him, I saw something else that drove him clean out of my mind. In fact, as soon as I'd seen it, I never thought about him any more, nor looked at him again."

"What was it?" demanded Viner, certain of what the answer would be.

"A diamond ring," replied Hyde. "It was lying on the flags close by the man. The light from the lamp fell full on it. And I snatched it up, thrust it into my pocket and ran up the passage. I ran into somebody at the far end—it turns out to have been you. Well, you saw me hurry off—I got as far away as I could, lest you or somebody else should follow. I wandered round Westbourne Grove, and then

up into Harrow Road, and in a sort of back street there I sneaked into a shanty in a yard, and stopped in it the rest of the night. And this morning I tried to pawn the ring."

"Having no idea of its value," suggested Viner, with a glance at Drillford, who was listening to everything with an immovable countenance.

"I thought it might be worth thirty or forty pounds," answered Hyde. "Of course, I'd no idea that it was worth what's been said. You see, I'm fairly presentable, and I thought I could tell a satisfactory story if I was asked anything at the pawnshop. I didn't anticipate any difficulty about pawning the ring—I don't think there'd have been any if it hadn't been for its value. A thousand pounds! Of course, I'd no idea of that!"

"And that's the whole truth?" asked Viner.

"It's the whole truth as far as I'm concerned," answered Hyde. "I certainly picked up that ring in that passage, close by this man who was lying there. But I didn't know he was dead; I didn't know he'd been murdered? All I know is that I was absolutely famishing, desperate, in no condition to think clearly about anything. I guess I should do the same thing again, under the circumstances. I only wish—"

HE paused and began muttering to himself, and the two listeners glanced at each other. "You only wish what, Hyde?" asked Viner.

"I wish it had been a half-crown instead of that ring!" said Hyde with a queer flashing glance at his audience. "I could have got a bed for fourpence, and have lived for three days on the rest. And now—"

Viner made no remark; and Drillford, who was leaning against his desk, watching his prisoner closely, tapped Hyde on the shoulder.

"Can you describe the man who came out of the passage as you entered it?" he asked. "Be accurate, now!"

Hyde's face brightened a little, and his eyes became more intelligent.

"Yes!" he answered. "You know—or you don't know—how your mental faculties get sharpened by hunger. I was dull enough, in one way, but alert enough in another. I can describe the man—as much as I saw of him. A tall man—neither broad nor slender—half-and-half. Dressed in black from top to toe. A silk hat—patent leather boots—and muffled to the eyes in a white silk handkerchief."

"Could you see his face?" asked Drillford. "Was he clean-shaven, or bearded, or what?"

"I tell you he was muffled to the very eyes," answered Hyde. "One of those big silk handkerchiefs, you know—he had it drawn up over his chin and nose—right up."

"Then you'd have difficulty in knowing him again," observed Drillford. "There are a few thousand men in the West End of London who'd answer the description you've given."

"All right!" muttered Hyde doggedly. "But—I know what I saw. And if you want to help me, Viner, find that man—because he must have come straight away from the body!"

Drillford turned to Viner, glancing at the same time at the clock.

"Do you want to ask him any more questions?" he inquired. "No? Well, there's just one I want to ask. What were you doing with that knife in your possession?" he went on, turning to Hyde. "Be careful, now; you heard what the doctor said about it, in court?"

"I've nothing to conceal," replied Hyde. "You heard me say just now that I'd had engagements in the States. I bought that knife when I was out West—more as a curiosity than anything—and I've carried it in my pocket ever since."

Drillford looked again at Viner.

"He'll have to go, now," he said. "If you're going to employ legal help for him, the solicitor will know where and when he can see him." He paused on his way to the door and looked a little doubtfully at his prisoner. "I'll give you a bit of advice," he said, "not as official, but as an individual. If you want to clear yourself, you'd better give all the information you can."

"I'll send my own solicitor to you, Hyde, at once," said Viner. "Be absolutely frank with him about everything."

WHEN Viner was once more alone with Drillford, the two men looked at each other.

"My own impression," said Viner, after a significant silence, "is that we have just heard the plain truth! I'm going to work on it, anyway."

"In that case, Mr. Viner, there's no need for me to say anything," remarked Drillford. "It may be the plain truth. But as I'm what I am, all I know is the first-hand evidence against this young fellow. So he really was a schoolmate of yours?"

"Certainly!" said Viner. "His people live, or did live, in the north. I shall have to get into communication with them. But now—what about the information he gave you? This man he saw?"

Drillford shook his head.

"Mr. Viner," he answered, "you don't understand police methods. We've got very strong evidence against Hyde. We know nothing about a tall man in a white muffler. If you want to clear Hyde, you'd better do what he suggested—find that man! I wish you might—if he ever existed!"

"You don't believe Hyde?" asked Viner.

"I'm not required to believe anything, sir, unless I've good proof of it," said Drillford with a significant smile. "If there is any mystery in this murder, well—let's hope something will clear it up."

Viner went away troubled and thoughtful. He remembered Hyde well enough now, though so many years had elapsed since their last meeting. And he was genuinely convinced of his innocence: there had been a ring of truth in all that he had said. Who, then, was the guilty man? And had robbery been the real motive of the murder? Might it not have been that Ashton had been murdered for some quite different motive, and that the murderer had hastily removed the watch, chain, purse, and rings from the body with the idea of diverting suspicion, and in his haste had dropped one of the rings?"

"If only one knew more about Ashton and his affairs!" mused Viner. "Even his own people don't seem to know much."

This reminded him of his promise to call on Miss Wickham. He glanced at his watch; it was not yet one o'clock; the proceedings before the magistrate and the subsequent talk with Hyde had occupied comparatively little time. So Viner walked rapidly to Number Seven in the square, intent on doing something toward clearing Hyde of the charge brought against him. The parlor-maid whom he had seen the night before admitted him at once; it seemed to Viner that he was expected. She led him straight to a room in which Mrs. Killenhall and Miss Wickham were in conversation with an elderly man, who looked at Viner with considerable curiosity when his name was mentioned, and who was presently introduced to him as Mr. Ashton's solicitor, Mr. Pawle, of Crawle, Pawle and Rattenbury.

CHAPTER VI

MR. PAWLE, an alert-looking, sharp-eyed little man, whom Viner at once recognized as having been present in the magistrate's court when Hyde was brought up, smiled as he shook hands with the new visitor.

"You don't know me, Mr. Viner," he said. "But I knew your father very well—he and I did a lot of business together in our time. You haven't followed his profession, I gather?"

"I'm afraid I haven't any profession, Mr. Pawle," answered Viner. "I'm a student—and a bit, a very little bit, of a writer."

"Aye, well, your father was a bit in that way too," remarked Mr. Pawle. "I remember that he was a great collector of books—you have his library, no doubt?"

"Yes, and I'm always adding to it," said Viner. "I shall be glad to show you my additions, any time."

Mr. Pawle turned to the two ladies, waving his hand at Viner.

"Knew his father most intimately," he said, as if he were guaranteeing the younger man's status. "Fine fellow, was Stephen Viner. Well," he continued, dropping into a chair, and pointing Viner to another, "this is a sad business that we've got concerned in, young man! Now, what do you think of the proceedings we've just heard? Your opinion, Mr. Viner, is probably better worth having than anybody's, for you saw this fellow running away from the scene, and you found my unfortunate client lying dead. What, frankly, *is* your opinion?"

"I had better tell you of something that's just happened," replied Viner. He went on to repeat the statements which Hyde had just made to Drillford and himself. "My opinion," he concluded, "is that Hyde is speaking the plain truth—that all he really did was, as he affirms, to pick up that ring and run away. I don't believe he murdered Mr. Ashton, and I'm going to do my best to clear him."

He looked round from one listener to another, seeking opinion from each. Mr.

Pawle maintained a professional imperturbability; Mrs. Killenhall looked mildly excited on hearing this new theory. But from Miss Wickham, Viner got a flash of intelligent comprehension.

"The real thing is this," she said, "none of us knew anything about Mr. Ashton, really. He may have had enemies."

Pawle rubbed his chin; the action suggested perplexity.

"Miss Wickham is quite right," he said. "Mr. Ashton is more or less a man of mystery. He had been here in England two months. His ward knows next to nothing about him, except that she was left in his guardianship many a year ago, that he sent her to England, to school, and that he recently joined her here. Mrs. Killenhall knows no more than that he engaged her as chaperon to his ward, and that they exchanged references. His references were to his bankers and to me. But neither his bankers nor I know anything of him, except that he was a very well-to-do man. I can tell precisely what his bankers know. It is merely this: he transferred his banking-account from an Australian bank to them on coming to London. I saw them this morning on first getting the news. They have about two hundred thousand pounds lying to his credit. That's absolutely all they know about him—all!"

"The Australian bankers would know more," suggested Viner.

"Precisely!" agreed Mr. Pawle. "We can get news from them, in time. But now, what do I know? No more than this: Mr. Ashton called on me about six or seven weeks ago, told me that he was an Australian who had come to settle in London, that he was pretty well off, and that he wanted to make a will. We drafted a will on his instructions, and he duly executed it. Here it is! Miss Wickham has just seen it. Mr. Ashton has left every penny he had to Miss Wickham. He told me she was the only child of an old friend of his, who had given her into his care on his death out in Australia, some years ago, and that as he, Ashton, had no near relations, he had always intended to leave her all he had. And so he has, without condition, or reservation, or anything—all is yours, Miss Wickham, and I'm your executor. But now," continued Mr. Pawle, "how far does this take us toward solving the mystery of my client's death? So far as I can see, next to nowhere! And I am certain of this, Mr. Viner, if we are going to solve it, and if this old school friend of yours is being unjustly accused, and is to be cleared, we must find out more about Ashton's doings since he came to London. The secret lies—there!"

"I quite agree," answered Viner. "But—who knows anything?"

Mr. Pawle looked at the two ladies.

"That's a stiff question!" he said. "The bankers tell me that Ashton only called on them two or three times; he called on me not oftener; neither they nor I ever had much conversation with him. These two ladies should know more about him than anybody—but they seem to know little."

VINER, who was sitting opposite to her, looked at Miss Wickham.

"You must know something about his daily life?" he said. "What did he do with himself?"

"We told you and the police-inspector pretty nearly all we know, last night," replied Miss Wickham. "As a rule, he used to go out of a morning—I think, from his conversation, he used to go down to the City. I don't think it was on business: I think he liked to look about him. Sometimes he came home to lunch; sometimes he didn't. Very often in the afternoon he took us for motor-rides into the country—sometimes he took us to the theaters. He used to go out a good deal, alone at night—we don't know where."

"Did he ever mention any club?" asked Mr. Pawle.

"No, never!" replied Miss Wickham. "He was reticent about himself—always very kind and thoughtful and considerate for Mrs. Killenhall and myself, but he was a reserved man."

"Did he ever have anyone here to see him?" inquired the solicitor. "Any men to dine, or anything of that sort?"

"No—not once. No one has ever even called on him," said Miss Wickham. "We have had two or three dinner-parties, but the people who came were friends of mine—two or three girls whom I knew at school, who are now married and live in London."

"A lonely sort of man!" commented Mr. Pawle. "Yet—he must have known people. Where did he go when he went into the City? Where did he go at night? There must be somebody somewhere who can tell more about him. I think it will be well if I ask for information through the newspapers."

"There is one matter we haven't men-

tioned," said Mrs. Killenhall. "Just after we got settled down here, Mr. Ashton went away for some days—three or four days. That, of course, may be quite insignificant."

"Do you know where he went?" asked Mr. Pawle.

"No, we don't know," answered Mrs. Killenhall. "He went away one Monday morning, saying that now everything was in order we could spare him for a few days. He returned on the following Thursday or Friday,—I forget which,—but he didn't tell us where he had been."

"You don't think any of the servants would know?' asked Mr. Pawle.

"Oh, dear me, no!" replied Mrs. Killenhall. "He was the sort of man who rarely speaks to his servants—except when he wanted something."

Mr. Pawle looked at his watch and rose.

"Well!" he said. "We shall have to find out more about my late client's habits and whom he knew in London. There may have been a motive for this murder of which we know nothing. Are you coming, Mr. Viner? I should like a word with you!"

Viner, too, had risen; he looked at Miss Wickham.

"I hope my aunt called on you this morning?" he asked. "I was coming with her, but I had to go round to the police-station."

"She did call, and she was very kind indeed, thank you," said Miss Wickham. "I hope she'll come again."

"We shall both be glad to do anything," said Viner. "Please don't hesitate about sending round for me if there's anything at all I can do." He followed Mr. Pawle into the square, and turned him towards his own house. "Come and lunch with me," he said. "We can talk over this at our leisure."

"THANK you—I will," answered Mr. Pawle. "Very pleased. Between you and me, Mr. Viner, this is a very queer business. I'm quite prepared to believe the story that young fellow Hyde tells. I wish he'd told it straight out in court. But you must see that he's in a very dangerous position—very dangerous indeed! The police, of course, wont credit a word of his tale—not they! They've got a strong *prima facie* case against him, and they'll follow it up for all they're worth. The thing to do, if you're to save him, is to find the real murderer. And to do that, you'll need all your wits! If one only had some theory!"

Viner introduced Mr. Pawle to Miss Penkridge with the remark that she was something of an authority in mysteries, and as soon as they had sat down to lunch, told her of Langton Hyde and his statement.

"Just so!" said Miss Penkridge dryly. "That's much more likely to be the real truth than that this lad killed Ashton. There's a great deal more in this murder than is on the surface, and I dare say Mr. Pawle agrees with me."

"I dare say I do," assented Mr. Pawle. "The difficulty is—how to penetrate into the thick cloak of mystery."

"When I was round there, at Number Seven, this morning," observed Miss Penkridge, "those two talked very freely to me about Mr. Ashton. Now, there's one thing struck me at once—there must be men in London who knew him. He couldn't go out and about, as he evidently did, without meeting men. Even if it wasn't in business, he'd meet men somewhere. And if I were you, I should invite men who knew him to come forward and tell what they know."

"It shall be done—very good advice, ma'am," said Mr. Pawle.

"And there's another thing," said Miss Penkridge. "I should find out what can be told about Mr. Ashton where he came from. I believe you can get telegraphic information from Australia within a few hours. Why not go to the expense—when there's so much at stake? Depend upon it, the real secret of this murder lies back in the past—perhaps the far past."

"That too shall be done," agreed Mr. Pawle. "I shouldn't be surprised if you're right."

"In my opinion," remarked Miss Penkridge, dryly, "the robbing of this dead man was all a blind. Robbery wasn't the motive. Murder was the thing in view! And why? It may have been revenge. It may be that Ashton had to be got out of the way. And I shouldn't wonder a bit if that isn't at the bottom of it, which is at the top and bottom of pretty nearly everything!"

"And that, ma'am?" asked Mr. Pawle, who evidently admired Miss Penkridge's shrewd observations, "that is what, now?"

"Money!" said Miss Penkridge. "Money!"

THE old solicitor went away, promising to get to work on the lines suggested by Miss Penkridge, and next day he telephoned to Viner asking him to come down to his offices in Bedford Row. Viner hurried off, and on arriving found Mr. Pawle with a cablegram before him.

"I sent a pretty long message to Melbourne, to Ashton's old bankers, as soon as I left you yesterday," he said. "I gave them the news of his murder, and asked for certain information. Here's their answer. I rang you up as soon as I got it."

Viner read the cablegram carefully:

> Deeply regret news. Ashton well known here. Thirty years dealer in real estate. Respected, wealthy. Quiet man, bachelor. Have made inquiries in quarters likely to know. Cannot trace anything about friend named Wickham. Ashton was away from Melbourne, upcountry, four years, some years ago. May have known Wickham then. Ashton left here end July, by *S. S. Maraquibo,* for London. Was accompanied by two friends, Fosdick and Stephens. Please inform if can do more.

"What do you think of that?" asked Mr. Pawle. "Not much in it, is there?"

"There's the mention of two men who might know something of Ashton's habits," said Viner. "If Fosdick and Stephens are still in England and were Ashton's friends, one would naturally conclude that he'd see them sometimes. Yet we haven't heard of their ever going to his house."

"We can be quite certain that they never did—from what the two ladies say," remarked Mr. Pawle. "Perhaps they don't live in London. I'll advertise for both. But now, here's another matter. I asked these people if they could tell me anything about Wickham, the father of this girl to whom Ashton's left his very considerable fortune. Well, you see, they can't. Now, it's a very curious thing, but Miss Wickham has no papers, has, in fact, nothing whatever to prove her identity. Nor have I. Ashton left nothing of that sort. I know no more, and she knows no more, than what he told both of us—that her father died when she was a mere child, her mother already being dead, that the father left her in Ashton's guardianship, and that Ashton, after sending her here to school, eventually came and took her to live with him. There isn't a single document really to show who she is, who her father was, or anything about her family."

"Is that very important?" asked Viner.

"It's decidedly odd!" said Mr. Pawle. "This affair seems to be getting more mysterious than ever."

"What's to be done next?" inquired Viner.

"Well, the newspapers are always very good about that," answered the solicitor. "I'm getting them to insert paragraphs asking the two men, Fosdick and Stephens, to come forward and tell us if they've seen anything of Ashton since he came to England; I'm also asking if anybody can tell us where Ashton was when he went away from home on that visit that Mrs. Killenhall spoke of. If—"

Just then a clerk came into Mr. Pawle's room, and bending down to him, whispered a few words which evidently occasioned him great surprise.

"At once!" he said. "Bring them straight in, Parkinson. God bless me!" he exclaimed, turning to Viner. "Here are the two men in question—Fosdick and Stephens! Saw our name in the paper as Ashton's solicitors and want to see me urgently."

CHAPTER VII

THE two men who were presently ushered in were typical Colonials—big, hefty fellows as yet in early middle age, alert, evidently prosperous, if their attire and appointments were anything to go by, and each was obviously deeply interested in the occasion of his visit to Mr. Pawle. Two pairs of quick eyes took in the old solicitor and his companion, and the elder of the men came forward in a businesslike manner.

"Mr. Pawle, I understand?" he said. "I'm Mr. Fosdick, of Melbourne, Victoria; this is my friend, Mr. Stephens, same place."

"Take a seat, Mr. Fosdick—have this chair, Mr. Stephens," responded Mr. Pawle. "You wish to see me—on business?"

"That's so," answered Fosdick as the two men seated themselves by the solicitor's desk. "We saw your name in the newspapers this morning in connection with the murder of John Ashton. Now, we knew John Ashton—he was a Melbourne man, too—and we can tell something about him. So we came to you instead of the police. Because, Mr. Pawle, what we can tell is maybe more a matter for a lawyer than for a policeman. It's mysterious."

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Pawle, "I'll be frank with you. I recognized your names

as soon as my clerk announced them. Here's a cablegram which I have just received from Melbourne—you'll see your names mentioned in it."

The two callers bent over the cablegram, and Fosdick looked up and nodded.

"Yes, that's right," he said. "We came over with John Ashton in the *Maraquibo*. We knew him pretty well before that—most folk in Melbourne did. But of course, we were thrown into his company on board ship rather more than we'd ever been before. And we very much regret to hear of what's happened to him."

"You say there is something you can tell?" observed Mr. Pawle. "If it's anything that will help to solve the mystery of this murder,—for there is a mystery,—I shall be very glad to hear it."

FOSDICK and Stephens glanced at each other and then at Viner, who sat a little in Mr. Pawle's rear.

"Partner of yours?" asked Fosdick.

"Not at all! This gentleman," replied Mr. Pawle, "is Mr. Viner. It was he who found Ashton's dead body. They were neighbors."

"Well, you found the body of a very worthy man, sir," remarked Fosdick gravely. "And we'd like to do something toward finding the man who killed him. For we don't think it was this young fellow who's charged with it, nor that robbery was the motive. We think John Ashton was—removed. Put out of the way!"

"Why, now?" asked Mr. Pawle.

"I'll tell you," replied Fosdick. "My friend Stephens, here, is a man of few words; he credits me with more talkativeness than he'll lay claim to. So I'm to tell the tale. There mayn't be much in it, and there may be a lot. We think there's a big lot! But this is what it comes to: Ashton was a close man, a reserved man. However, one night, when the three of us were having a quiet cigar in a corner of the smoking saloon in the *Maraquibo*, he opened out to us a bit. We'd been talking about getting over to England—we'd all three emigrated, you'll understand, when we were very young—and the talk ran on what we would do. Stephens and I, d'ye see, were only on a visit,—which is just coming to an end, Mr. Pawle; we sail home in a day or two,—but Ashton was turning home for good. And he said to us, in a sort of burst of confidence, that he'd have plenty to do when he landed. He said that he was in possession—sole possession—of a most extraordinary secret, the revelation of which would affect one of the first families in England, and he was going to bring it out as soon as he'd got settled down in London. Well—you may be surprised, but—that's all."

"All you can tell?" exclaimed Mr. Pawle.

"All! But we can see plenty in it," said Fosdick. "Our notion is that Ashton was murdered by somebody who didn't want that secret to come out. Now, you see if events don't prove we're right!"

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Pawle, "allow me to ask you a few questions."

"Many as you please, sir," assented Fosdick. "We'll answer anything."

"He didn't tell you what the secret was?" asked Mr. Pawle.

"No. He said we'd know more about it in time," replied Fosdick. "It would possibly lead to legal proceedings, he said—in that case, it would be one of the most celebrated cases ever known."

"And romantic," added Stephens, speaking for the first time. "Romantic! That was the term he used."

"And romantic—quite so," assented Fosdick. "Celebrated and romantic—those were the words. But in any case, he said, whether it got to law matters or not, it couldn't fail to be in the papers, and we should read all about it in due time."

"And you know no more than that?" inquired Mr. Pawle.

"Nothing!" said Fosdick with decision.

MR. PAWLE looked at Viner as if to seek some inspiration. And Viner took up the work of examination.

"Do you know anything of Mr. Ashton's movements since he came to London?" he asked.

"Next to nothing," replied Fosdick. "Ashton left the *Maraquibo* at Naples, and came overland—he wanted to put in a day or two in Rome and a day or two in Paris. We came round by sea to Tilbury. Then Stephens and I separated—he went to see his people in Scotland, and I went to mine in Lancashire. We met—Stephens and I—in London here last week. And we saw Ashton for just a few minutes, down in the City."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Pawle. "You have seen him, then! Did anything happen?"

"You mean relating to what he'd told us?" said Fosdick. "Well, no more than I asked him, sort of jokingly, how the

secret was. And he said it was just about to come out, and we must watch the papers."

"There was a remark he made," observed Stephens. "He said it would be of just as much interest, perhaps of far more, to our Colonial papers as to the English."

"Yes—he said that," agreed Fosdick. "He knew, you see, that we were just about setting off home."

"He didn't ask you to his house?" inquired Mr. Pawle.

"That was mentioned, but we couldn't fix dates," replied Fosdick. "However, we told him we were both coming over again on business, next year, and we'd come and see him then."

Mr. Pawle spread out his hands with a gesture of helplessness.

"We're as wise as ever," he exclaimed.

"No," said Fosdick emphatically, "wiser! The man had a secret, affecting powerful interests. Many a man's been put away for having a secret."

Mr. Pawle put his finger-tips together and looked thoughtfully at his elder visitor.

"Well, there's a good deal in that," he said at last. "Now, while you're here, perhaps you can tell me something else about Ashton. How long have you known him?"

"Ever since we were lads," answered Fosdick readily. "He was a grown man, then, though. Stephens and I are about forty—Ashton was sixty."

"You've always known of him as a townsman of Melbourne?"

"That's so. We were taken out there when we were about ten or twelve—Ashton lived near where we settled down. He was a speculator in property—made his money in buying and selling lots."

"Was he well known?"

"Everybody knew Ashton."

"Did you ever know of his having a friend named Wickham?" inquired Mr. Pawle with a side glance at Viner. "Think carefully, now!"

FOSDICK shook his head, and Stephens shook his.

"Never heard the name," said Fosdick.

"Did you ever hear Ashton mention the name?" asked Mr. Pawle.

"Never!"

"Never heard him mention it on board ship—when he was coming home?"

"No—never!"

"Well," said Mr. Pawle, "I happen to know that Ashton, some years ago, had a very particular friend named Wickham, out in Australia."

A sudden light came into Fosdick's keen gray-blue eyes.

"Ah," he said. "I can tell how that may be. A good many years ago, when we were just familiar enough with Melbourne to know certain people in it, I remember that Ashton was away upcountry for some time—as that cablegram says. Most likely he knew this Wickham then. Is that the Wickham mentioned there?"

"It is," assented Mr. Pawle, "and I want to know who he was."

"Glad to set any inquiries going for you when we get back," said Fosdick. "We sail in two days."

"Gentlemen," answered Mr. Pawle gravely, "it takes, I believe, five or six weeks to reach Australia. By the time you get there, this unfortunate fellow Hyde, who's charged with the murder of Ashton, on evidence that is quite sufficient to satisfy an average British jury, will probably have been tried, convicted and hanged. No! I'm afraid we must act at once if we're to help him, as Mr. Viner here is very anxious to do. And there's something you can do. The coroner's inquest is to be held tomorrow. Go there and volunteer the evidence you've just told us! It mayn't do a scrap of good—but it will introduce an element of doubt into the case against Hyde, and that will benefit him."

"Tomorrow?" said Fosdick. "We'll do it. Give us the time and place. We'll be there, Mr. Pawle. I see your point, sir—to introduce the idea that there's more in this than the police think."

WHEN the two callers had gone, Mr. Pawle turned to Viner.

"Now, my friend," he said, "you've already sent your own solicitor to Hyde, haven't you? Who is he, by the by?"

"Felpham, of Chancery Lane," replied Viner.

"Excellent man! Now," said Mr. Pawle, "you go to Felpham and tell him what these two Australians have just told us, and say that in my opinion it will be well worth while, in his client's interest, to develop their evidence for all it's worth. That theory of Fosdick's may have a great deal in it. And another thing—Felpham must insist on Hyde being present at the inquest tomorrow and giving evidence. That, I say, must be done! Hyde must make his story public as soon as possible. He must

be brought to the inquest. He'll be warned by the coroner, of course, that he's not bound to give any evidence at all, but he must go into the box and tell, on oath, all that he told you and Drillford. Now be off to Felpham and insist on all this being done."

VINER went away to Chancery Lane more puzzled than ever. What was this secret, affecting one of the first families in England, of which Ashton had told his two Melbourne friends? How was it, if legal proceedings were likely to arise out of it, that Ashton had not told Pawle about it? Was it possible that he had gone to some other solicitor? If so, why didn't he come forward? And what, too, was this mystery about Miss Wickham and her father? Why, as Pawle had remarked, was there no papers or documents, concerning her to be found anywhere? Had she anything to do with the secret? It seemed to him that the confusion was becoming more confounded. But the first thing to do was to save Hyde. And he was relieved to see that Felpham jumped at Pawle's suggestion.

"Good!" said Felpham. "Of course, I'll have Hyde brought up at the inquest, and he shall tell his story. And we'll save these Australian chaps until Hyde's been in the box. I do wish Hyde himself could tell us more about that man whom he saw leaving the passage. Of course, that man is the actual murderer."

"You think that?" asked Viner.

"Don't doubt it for one moment—and a cool, calculating hand, too!" declared Felpham. "Who is he? But—we're not doing badly."

That, too, was Viner's impression when he walked out of the coroner's court next day. After having endured its close and sordid atmosphere for four long hours, he felt, more from intuition than from anything tangible, that things had gone well for Hyde. One fact was plain—nothing more could be brought out against Hyde, either there, when the inquest was resumed a week later, or before the magistrate, or before a judge and jury. Every scrap of evidence against him was produced before the coroner: it was obvious that the police could rake up no more, unless indeed they could prove him to have hidden Ashton's remaining valuables somewhere which was ostensibly an impossibility. And the evidence of Hyde himself had impressed the court. Two days' rest and refreshment, even in a prison and on prison fare, had pulled him together, and he had given his evidence clearly and confidently. Viner had seen that people were impressed by it: they had been impressed, too, by the evidence volunteered by the two Australians. And when the coroner announced that he should adjourn the inquiry for a week, the folk who had crowded the court went away asking each other not if Hyde was guilty, but what was this secret of which Ashton had boasted the possession?

Drillford caught Viner up as he walked down the street and smiled grimly at him.

"Well, you're doing your best for him, and no mistake, Mr. Viner," he said. "He's a lucky chap to have found such a friend!"

"He's as innocent as I am," answered Viner. "Look here, if you police want to do justice, why don't you try to track the man whom Hyde has told of?"

"What clue have we?" exclaimed Drillford almost contemptuously. "A tall man in black clothes, muffled to his eyes! But I'll tell you what, Mr. Viner," he added with a grin: "as you're so confident, why don't *you* find him?"

"Perhaps I shall," said Viner, quietly.

He meant what he said, and he was thinking deeply what might be done towards accomplishing his desires, when, later in the afternoon, Mr. Pawle rang him up on the telephone.

"Run down!" said Mr. Pawle cheerily. "There's a new development!"

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Viner, half an hour later, walked into the waiting-room at Crawle, Pawle and Rattenbury's, he was aware of a modestly attired young woman, evidently, from her dress and appearance, a country girl, who sat shyly turning over the pages of an illustrated paper. And as soon as he got into Pawle's private room, the old solicitor jerked his thumb at the door by which Viner had entered, and smiled significantly.

"See that girl outside?" he asked. "She's the reason of my ringing you up."

"Yes?" said Viner. "More mystery?"

"Don't know," said Mr. Pawle. "I've kept her story till you came. She turned up here about three-quarters of an hour ago, and said that her grandmother, who keeps an inn at Marketstoke, in Buckinghamshire, had seen the paragraph in the

papers this morning in which I asked if anybody could give any information about Mr. John Ashton's movements, and had immediately sent her off to me with the message that a gentleman of that name stayed at their house for a few days some weeks since, and that if I would send somebody over there, she, the grandmother, could give some particulars about him. So that solves the question we were talking of at Markendale Square, as to where Ashton went during the absence Mrs. Killenhall told us of."

"If this is the same Ashton," suggested Viner.

"We'll soon decide that," answered Mr. Pawle as he touched the bell on his desk. "I purposely awaited your coming before hearing what this young woman had to tell. Now, my dear," he continued as a clerk brought the girl into the room, "take a chair and tell me what your message is, more particularly. You're from Marketstoke, eh? Just so—and your grandmother, who sent you here, keeps an inn there?"

"Yes sir, the Ellingham Arms," replied the girl as she sat down and glanced a little nervously at her two interviewers.

"To be sure. And your grandmother's name is—what?"

"Hannah Summers, sir."

"Mrs. Hannah Summers. Grandfather living?"

"No sir."

"Very well—Mrs. Hannah Summers, landlady at the Ellingham Arms, Marketstoke, in Buckinghamshire. Now then—but what's your name, my dear?"

"Lucy Summers, sir."

"Very pretty name, I'm sure! Well, and what's the message your grandmother sent me? I want this gentleman to hear it."

"Grandmother wished me to say, sir, that we read the piece in the paper this morning asking if anybody could give you any news about a Mr. John Ashton, and that as we had a gentleman of that name staying with us for three or four days some weeks since, she sent me to tell you, and to say that if you would send somebody down to see her, she could give some information about him."

"Very clearly put, my dear—much obliged to you," said Mr. Pawle. "Now, I suppose you were at the Ellingham Arms when this Mr. Ashton came there?"

"Oh, yes sir; I live there!"

"To be sure! Now, what sort of man was he—in appearance?"

"A tall, big gentleman, sir, with a beard, going a little gray. He was wearing a blue serge suit."

MR. PAWLE nodded at Viner.

"Seems like our man," he remarked. "Now," he went on, turning again to Lucy Summers, "you say he stayed there three or four days. What did he do with himself while he was there?"

"He spent a good deal of time about the church, sir," answered the girl, "and he was at Ellingham Park a good deal—"

"Whose place is that?" interrupted Mr. Pawle.

"Lord Ellingham's sir."

"Do you mean that Mr. Ashton called on Lord Ellingham, or what?"

"No sir, because Lord Ellingham wasn't there—he scarcely ever is there," replied Lucy Summers. "I mean that Mr. Ashton went into the park a good deal and looked over the house—a good many people come to see Ellingham Park, sir."

"Well, and what else?" asked Mr. Pawle. "Did he go to see people in the town at all?"

"I don't know, sir—but he was out most of the day. And at night he talked a great deal with my grandmother, in her sitting-room, I think," added the girl with a glance which took in both listeners. "I think that's what she wants to tell about. She would have come here herself, but she's over seventy and doesn't like traveling."

Mr. Pawle turned to Viner.

"Now we know where we are," he said. "There's no doubt that this is our Ashton, and that Mrs. Summers has something she can tell about him. Viner, I suggest that you and I go down to Marketstoke this afternoon. You've accommodation for a couple of gentlemen, I suppose, my dear?" he added, turning to the girl. "Couple of nice bedrooms and a bit of dinner, eh?"

"Oh, yes sir!" replied Lucy Summers. "We constantly have gentlemen there, sir."

"Very well," said Mr. Pawle. "Now, then, you run away home to Marketstoke, my dear, and tell your grandmother that I'm very much obliged to her, and that I am coming down this evening, with this gentleman, Mr. Viner, and that we shall be obliged if she'll have a nice, plain, well-cooked dinner ready for us at half-past seven. We shall come in my motorcar—you can put that up for the night, and my driver too? Very well—that's settled. Now, come along, and one of my clerks

shall get you a cab to your station. Great Central, isn't it? All right—mind you get yourself a cup of tea before going home.

"Viner," continued Pawle, when he had taken the girl into the outer office, "we can easily run down to Marketstoke in under two hours. I'll call for you at your house at half-past five. And then—we'll hear what this old lady has to tell."

Viner, who was musing somewhat vaguely over these curious developments, looked at Mr. Pawle as if in speculation about his evident optimism.

"You think we shall hear something worth hearing?" he asked.

"I should say we probably shall," replied Mr. Pawle. "Put things together. Ashton goes away—as soon as he's got settled down in Markendale Square—on a somewhat mysterious journey. Now we hear that he had a secret. Perhaps something relating to that secret is mixed up with his visit to Marketstoke. Depend upon it, an old woman of over seventy—especially a landlady of a country-town inn, whose wits are presumably pretty sharp—wouldn't send for me unless she'd something to tell. Before midnight, my dear sir, we may have learned a good deal."

Viner picked up his hat.

"I'll be ready for you at half-past five," he said. Then, halfway to the door, he turned with a question: "By the by," he added, "you wouldn't like me to tell the two ladies that we've found out where Ashton went when he was away?"

"I think not until we've found out why he went away," answered the old lawyer with a significant smile. "We may draw the covert blank, you know, after all. When we've some definite news—"

VINER nodded, went out, jumped into a cab at the top of Bedford Row and hastened back to Markendale Square to pack a bag and prepare for his journey. Miss Penkridge called to him from the drawing-room as he was running upstairs; he turned into the room to find her in company with two ladies—dismal, pathetic figures in very plain and obviously countrified garments, both in tears and evident great distress, who, as Viner walked in, rose from their chairs and gazed at him sadly and wistfully. They reminded him at once of the type of spinster found in quiet, unpretentious cottages in out-of-the-way villages—the neither young nor old women, who live on circumscribed means and are painfully shy of the rude world outside. And before either he or Miss Penkridge could speak, the elder of the two broke into an eager exclamation.

"Oh, Mr. Viner, we are Langton's sisters! And we are so grateful to you—and oh, do you think you can save him?"

Viner was quick to seize the situation. He said a soothing word or two, begged his visitors to sit down again, and whispered to Miss Penkridge to ring for tea.

"You have come to town today?" he asked.

"We left home very, very early this morning," replied the elder sister. "We learned this dreadful news last night in the evening paper. We came away at four o'clock this morning,—we live in Durham, Mr. Viner,—and we have been to Mr. Felpham's office this afternoon. He told us how kind you had been in engaging his services for our unfortunate brother, and we came to thank you. But oh, do you think there is any chance for him?"

"Every chance!" declared Viner, pretending more conviction than he felt. "Don't let yourselves be cast down. We'll move heaven and earth to prove that he's wrongly accused. I gather—if you don't mind my asking—that your brother has been out of touch with you for some time?"

THE two sisters exchanged mournful glances.

"We had not heard anything of Langton for some years," replied the elder. "He is much—much younger than ourselves, and perhaps we are too staid and old-fashioned for him. But if we had known that he was in want! Oh, dear me, we are not at all well-to-do, Mr. Viner, but we would have sacrificed anything. Mr. Felpham says that we shall be allowed to visit him—he is going to arrange for us to do so. And of course we must remain in London until this terrible business is over—we came prepared for that."

"Prepared for that!" repeated the other sister, who seemed to be a fainter replica of the elder. "Yes, prepared, of course, Mr. Viner."

"Now that we have found Langton, though in such painful circumstances," said the first speaker, "we must stand by him. We must find some quiet lodging, and settle down to help. We cannot let all the burden fall on you, Mr. Viner."

Viner glanced at Miss Penkridge. They were quick to understand each other, these

two, and he knew at once that Miss Penkridge saw what was in his mind.

"You must stay with us," he said, turning to the two mournful figures. "We have any amount of room in this house, and we shall be only too glad—"

"Oh, but that is too—" began both ladies.

"I insist," said Viner, with a smile.

"We both insist!" echoed Miss Penkridge. "We are both given to having our own way, too; so say no more about it. We are all in the same boat just now, and its name is *Mystery*, and we must pull together until we're in harbor."

"Listen!" said Viner. "I have to go away tonight, on a matter closely connected with this affair. Let me leave you in my aunt's charge, and tomorrow I may be able to give you some cheering news. You'll be much more comfortable here than in any lodging or hotel and—and I should like to do something for Hyde; we're old schoolfellows, you know."

Then he escaped from the room and made ready for his journey; and at half-past five came Mr. Pawle in his private car and carried him off into the dark.

An hour and a half later the car rolled smoothly into the main street of a quiet, wholly Arcadian little town, and pulled up before an old-fashioned many-gabled house over the door of which was set up one of those ancient signs which, in such places, display the coat of arms of the lord of the manor. Viner had just time to glance around him, and in a clear, starlit evening, to see the high tower of a church, the timbered fronts of old houses, and many a tall, venerable tree, before following Mr. Pawle into a stone hall filled with dark oak cabinets and bright with old brass and pewter, on the open hearth of which burned a fine and cheery fire of logs.

"Excellent!" muttered the old lawyer as he began to take off his multitudinous wraps. "A real bit of the real old England! Viner, if the dinner is as good as this promises, I shall be glad we've come, whatever the occasion."

"Here's the landlady, I suppose," said Viner as a door opened.

A tall, silver-haired old woman, surprisingly active and vivacious in spite of her evident age, came forward with a polite, old-fashioned bow. She wore a silk gown and a silk apron and a smart cap, and her still bright eyes took in the two visitors at a glance.

"Your servant, gentlemen," she said. "Your rooms are ready, and dinner will be ready too, when you are. This way, if you please."

"A very fine old house this, ma'am," observed Mr. Pawle as they followed her up a curious staircase, all nooks and corners. "And you have, no doubt, been long in it?"

"Born in it, sir," said the landlady, with a laugh. "Our family—on one side—has been here two hundred years. This is your room, sir—this is your friend's." She paused, and with a significant look, pointed to another door. "That," she said, "is the room which Mr. Ashton had when he was here."

"Ah! We are very anxious to know what you can tell us about him, ma'am," said Mr. Pawle.

Mrs. Summers paused, and again glanced significantly at her visitors.

"I wish I knew the meaning of what I shall tell you," she answered.

CHAPTER IX

ON the principle that business should never be discussed when one is dining, Mr. Pawle made no reference during dinner to the matter which had brought Viner and himself to the Ellingham Arms. He devoted all his attention and energies to the pleasures of the table; he praised the grilled soles and roast mutton and grew enthusiastic over some old Burgundy which Mrs. Summers strongly recommended. But when dinner was over and he had drunk a glass or two of old port, his eyes began to turn toward the door of the quaint little parlor in which he and Viner had been installed, and to which the landlady had promised to come.

"I confess I'm unusually curious about what we're going to hear, Viner," he said as he drew out a well-filled cigar-case. "In my profession we hear a great deal more of romance than most folk would imagine. Now, here's a man who returns to this country from a long residence in Australia. The first thing he does, after getting settled down in London, is to visit Marketstoke. Why Marketstoke? And why this, the very first place in England? For what reason? Now, as a lawyer, a reason does suggest itself to me; I've been thinking about it ever since that rosy-cheeked lass called at my office this afternoon. What does the man who's been away from his native land

for the best part of his life do, as a rule, when at last he sets foot on it again—eh?"

"I'm not greatly experienced," replied Viner, smiling at the old solicitor's professional enthusiasm. "What does he do—usually?"

"Makes his way as soon as possible to his native place!" exclaimed Mr. Pawle, with an expressive flourish of his cigar. "That, usually, is the first thing he thinks of."

"Are you suggesting that Ashton was probably a native of Marketstoke?" asked Viner.

"I mean to find out—no matter what we hear from the landlady—if that name is to be found in the parish register here, anyway," answered Mr. Pawle. "You can be sure of this—Ashton came to this obscure country town for some special purpose. What was it? And—had it anything to do with, did it lead up to, his murder? That—"

A light tap at the door heralded the approach of Mrs. Summers.

"That," repeated Mr. Pawle, as he jumped up from his chair and politely threw the door open, "is what I mean to endeavor—endeavor, at any rate—to discover. —Come in, ma'am," he continued, gallantly motioning the old landlady to the easiest chair in the room. "We are very eager, indeed, to hear what you can tell us. Our cigars, now—"

"Pray, don't mention them, sir," responded Mrs. Summers. "I hope you are quite comfortable, and that you are having everything you wish?"

"Nothing, ma'am, could be more pleasant and gratifying, as far as material comfort goes," answered Mr. Pawle with conviction. "The dinner was excellent; your wine is sound; this old room is a veritable haven! I wish we were visiting you under less sad conditions. And now about your recollections of this poor gentleman, ma'am?"

THE landlady laid a large book on the table, and opening it at a page whereat she had placed a marker, pointed to a signature.

"That is the writing of the Mr. John Ashton who came here," she said. "He registered his name and address the day he came—there it is: 'John Ashton, Seven Markendale Square, London, W.' You gentlemen will recognize it, perhaps?"

Mr. Pawle put up his glasses, glanced once at the open book, and turned to Viner with a confirmatory nod.

"That's Ashton's writing, without a doubt," he said. "It's a signature not to be forgotten when you've once seen it. Well, that establishes the fact that he undoubtedly came here on that date. Now, ma'am, what can you tell about him?"

Mrs. Summers took the chair which Viner drew forward to the hearth and folded her hands over her silk apron.

"Well sir," she answered, "a good deal. Mr. Ashton came here one Monday afternoon, in a motorcar, with his luggage, and asked if I could give him rooms and accommodation for a few days. Of course I could—he had this room and the room I pointed out upstairs, and he stayed here until Thursday, when he left soon after lunch—the same car came for him. And he hadn't been in the house an hour, gentlemen, before I wondered if he hadn't been here before."

"Interesting—very!" said Mr. Pawle. "Now, why, ma'am, did you wonder that?"

"Well sir," replied Mrs. Summers, "because, after he'd looked round the house, and seen his room upstairs, he went out to the front door, and then I followed him, to ask if he had any particular wishes about his dinner that evening. Our front door, as you will see in the morning, fronts the market square, and from it you can see about all there is to see of the town. He was standing at the door, under the porch, looking all round him, and I overheard him talking to himself as I went up behind him.

"'Aye!' he was saying, as he looked this way and that, 'there's the old church, and the old moot-hall, and the old marketplace, and the old gabled and thatched houses, and even the old town pump—they haven't changed a bit, I reckon, in all these years!' Then he caught sight of me, and he smiled. 'Not many changes in this old place, landlady, in your time?' he said pleasantly. 'No sir,' I answered. 'We don't change much in even a hundred years in Marketstoke.' 'No!' he said, and shook his head. 'No—the change is in men, in men!' And then he suddenly set straight off across the square to the churchyard. 'You've known Marketstoke before,' I said to myself."

"You didn't ask him that?" inquired Mr. Pawle, eagerly.

"I didn't, sir," replied Mrs. Summers. "I never asked him a question all the time he was here. I thought that if I was correct in what I fancied, I should hear him

say something. But he never did say anything of that sort—all the same, I felt more and more certain that he did know the place. And during the time he was here, he went about in it in a fashion that convinced me that my ideas were right. He was in and around the church a great deal—the vicar and the parish clerk can tell you more about his visits there than I can—and he was at the old moot-hall several times, looking over certain old things they keep there, and he visited Ellingham Park twice, and was shown over the house. And before he's been here two days I came to a certain conclusion about him, and I've had it ever since, though he never said one word, or did one thing that could positively confirm me in it."

"Yes!" exclaimed Mr. Pawle. "And that, ma'am, was—"

"That he was somebody who disappeared from Marketstoke thirty-five years ago," answered the landlady, "disappeared completely, and has never been heard of from that day to this!"

Mr. Pawle turned slowly and looked at Viner. He nodded his head several times, then turned to Mrs. Summers and regarded her fixedly.

"And that somebody?" he asked in hushed accents. "Who was he?"

The landlady smoothed her silk apron and shook her head.

"It's a long story, sir," she answered. "I think you must have heard something of it—though to be sure, it was not talked of much at the time, and didn't become public until legal proceedings became necessary, some years ago. You're aware, of course, that just outside the town here is Ellingham Park, the seat of the Earl of Ellingham. Well, what I have to tell you has to do with them, and I shall have to go back a good way. Thirty-five years ago the head of the family was the seventh Earl, who was then getting on in life. He was a very overbearing, harsh old gentleman, not at all liked—the people here in Marketstoke, nearly all of them his tenants, used to be perpetually at variance with him about something or other; he was the sort of man who wanted to have his own way about everything. And he had trouble at home, at any rate with his elder son,—he only had two sons and no daughter,—and about the time I'm talking of it came to a head. Nobody ever knew exactly what it was all about, but it was well known that Lord Marketstoke—that was the elder son's name—and his father, the Earl, were at cross-purposes, if not actually at daggers drawn, about something or other. And when Lord Marketstoke was about twenty-five or twenty-six there was a great quarrel between them; it broke out one night, after dinner; the servants heard angry words between them. That night, gentlemen, Lord Marketstoke left the house and set off to London, and from that day to this he has never been heard of or seen again—hereabouts, at any rate."

MR. PAWLE, who was listening with the deepest interest and attention, glanced at Viner as if to entreat the same care on his part.

"I do remember something of this, now I come to think of it," he said. "There were some legal proceedings in connection with this disappearance, I believe, some years ago."

"Yes sir—they were in the newspapers," asserted the old landlady. "But of course, those of us about here knew of how things stood long before that. Lord Marketstoke went away, as I have said. It was known that he had money of his own that had come to him from his mother, who had died years before all this. But it wasn't known where he went. Some said he'd gone to the Colonies; some said to America. And at one time there was a rumor that he'd taken another name and joined some foreign army, and been killed in its service. Anyway, nobody ever heard a word of him—Mr. Marcherson, who was steward at Ellingham Park for over forty years (he died last year, a very old man) assured me that from the day on which Lord Marketstoke left his father's house not one word of him, not a breath, ever reached any of those he'd left behind him. There was absolute silence—he couldn't have disappeared more completely if they'd laid him in the family vault in Marketstoke church."

"An evident intention to disappear!" observed Mr. Pawle. "You'll mark that, Viner—it's important. Well, ma'am," he added, turning again to Mrs. Summers. "And—what happened next?"

"Well sir, there was nothing much happened," continued the landlady. "Matters went on in pretty much the usual way. The old Earl got older, of course, and his temper got worse. Mr. Marcherson assured me that he was never known to mention his missing son—to anybody. And in the end, perhaps about fifteen years after

Lord Marketstoke had gone away, he died. And then there was no end of trouble and bother. The Earl had left no will; at any rate, no will could be found, and no lawyer could be heard of who had ever made one. And of course, nobody knew where the new Earl was, nor even if he was alive or dead. There were advertisements sent out all over the world—Mr. Marcherson told me that they were translated into I don't know how many foreign languages and published in every quarter of the globe—asking for news of him and stating that his father was dead. That was done for some time."

"With no result?" asked Mr. Pawle.

"No result whatever, sir—I understand that the family solicitors never had one single reply," answered Mrs. Summers. "I understand, too, that for some time before the old Earl's death they'd been trying to trace Lord Marketstoke from his last known movements. But that had failed too. He had chambers in London, and he kept a manservant there; the manservant could only say that on the night on which his young master left Ellingham Park he returned to his chambers, went to bed—and had gone when he, the manservant, rose in the morning. No sir; all the efforts and advertisements were no good whatever, and after some time—some considerable time—the younger brother, the Honorable Charles Cave-Gray—"

"Cave-Gray? Is that the family name?" interrupted Mr. Pawle.

"That's the family name, sir—Cave-Gray," replied Mrs. Summers. "One of the oldest families in these parts, sir—the earldom dates from Queen Anne. Well, the Honorable Charles Cave-Gray, and his solicitors, of course, came to the conclusion that Lord Marketstoke was dead, and so—I don't understand the legal niceties, gentlemen, but they went to the courts to get something done which presumed his death and let Mr. Charles come into the title and estates. And in the end that was done, and Mr. Charles became eighth Earl of Ellingham."

"I remember it now," muttered Mr. Pawle. "Yes—curious case. But it was proved to the court, I recollect, that everything possible had been done to find the missing heir—and without result."

"Just so, sir, and so Mr. Charles succeeded," asserted Mrs. Summers. "He was a very nice, pleasant man, not a bit like his father—a very good and considerate landlord, and much respected. But he's gone now—died three years ago; and his son, a young man of twenty-two or -three, succeeded him—that's the present Earl, gentlemen. And of him we see very little; he's scarcely ever stayed at Ellingham Park, except for a bit of shooting, since he came to the title. And now," she concluded, with a shrewd glance at the old lawyer, "I wonder if you see, sir, what it was that came into my mind when this Mr. John Ashton came here a few weeks ago, especially after I heard him say what he did, and after I saw how he was spending his time here?"

"I've no inkling, ma'am; I've no inkling!" said Mr. Pawle. "You wondered—"

"I wondered," murmured Mrs. Summers, bending closer to her listeners, "if the man who called himself John Ashton wasn't in reality the long-lost Lord Marketstoke."

CHAPTER X

MR. PAWLE, after a glance at Viner which seemed to be full of many meanings, bent forward in his chair and laid a hand on the old landlady's arm.

"Now, have you said as much as that to anybody before?" he asked, eying her significantly. "Have you mentioned it to your neighbors, for instance, or to anyone in the town?"

"No sir!" declared Mrs. Summers promptly. "Not to a soul! I'm given to keeping my ideas to myself, especially on matters of importance. There is no one here in Marketstoke that I would have mentioned such a thing to, now that the late steward, Mr. Marcherson, is dead. I shouldn't have mentioned it to you two gentlemen if it hadn't been for this dreadful news in the papers. No, I've kept my thoughts at home."

"Wise woman!" said Mr. Pawle. "But now let me ask you a few questions. Did you know this Lord Marketstoke before he disappeared?"

"I only saw him two or three times," replied the landlady. "It was seldom that he came to Ellingham Park, after his majority. Of course, I saw him a good deal when he was a mere boy. But after he was grown up, only, as I say, a very few times."

"But you remember him?" suggested Mr. Pawle.

"Oh, very well indeed!" said Mrs. Summers. "I saw him last a day or two before he went away for good."

"Well, now, did you think you recognized anything of him—making allowance for the difference in age—in this man who called himself John Ashton?" asked Mr. Pawle. "For that, of course, is important!"

"Mr. Ashton," answered Mrs. Summers, "was just such a man as Lord Marketstoke might have been expected to become. Height, build—all the Cave-Grays that I've known were big men—color, were alike. Of course, Mr. Ashton had a beard, slightly gray, but he was a crown-haired man. All the family had crown hair; the present Lord Ellingham is crown-haired. And Mr. Ashton had gray eyes—every Cave-Gray that I remember was gray-eyed. I should say that Mr. Ashton was just what I should have expected Lord Marketstoke to be at sixty."

"I suppose Ashton never said or did anything here to reveal his secret, if he had one?" asked Mr. Pawle, after a moment's thoughtful pause.

"Oh, nothing!" replied Mrs. Summers. "He occupied himself, as I tell you, while he was here, and finally he went away in the car in which he had come, saying that he had greatly enjoyed his stay, and that we should see him again sometime. No—he never said anything—about himself, that is. But he asked me several questions; I used to talk to him sometimes, of an evening, about the present Lord Ellingham."

"What sort of questions?" inquired Mr. Pawle.

"Oh—as to what sort of young man he was, and if he was a good landlord and so on," replied Mrs. Summers. "And I purposely told him about the disappearance of thirty-five years ago, just to see what he would say about it."

"Ah! And what did he say?" asked Mr. Pawle.

"Nothing—except that it was extraordinary how people could disappear in this world," said Mrs. Summers. "Whether he was interested or not, he didn't show it."

"Probably felt that he knew more about it than you did," chuckled the old solicitor. "Well, ma'am, we're much obliged to you. Now take my advice and keep to your very excellent plan of saying nothing. Tomorrow morning we will just have a look into certain things, and see if we can discover anything really pertinent, and you shall know what conclusion we come to."

"Viner!" Pawle went on, when the old landlady had left them alone, "what do you think of this extraordinary story? Upon my word, I think it quite possible that the old lady's theory may be right, and that Ashton may really have been the missing Lord Marketstoke!"

"You think it probable that a man who was heir to an English earldom and to considerable estates could disappear like that, for so many years, and then reappear?" asked Viner.

"I WONT discuss the probability," answered Mr. Pawle, "but that it's possible I should readily affirm. I've known several very extraordinary cases of disappearance. In this particular instance,—granting things to be as Mrs. Summers suggests,—see how easy the whole thing is. This young man disappears. He goes to a far-off colony under an assumed name. Nobody knows him. It is ten thousand to one against his being recognized by visitors from home. All the advertising in the world will fail to reveal his identity. The only person who knows who he is is himself. And if he refuses to speak—there you are!"

"What surprises me," remarked Viner, "is that a man who evidently lived a new life for thirty-five years and prospered most successfully in it, should want to return to the old one."

"Ah, but you never know!" said the old lawyer. "Family feeling, old associations, loss of the old place—eh? As men get older, their thoughts turn fondly to the scenes and memories of their youth, Viner. If Ashton was really the Lord Marketstoke who disappeared, he may have come down here with no other thought than that of just revisiting his old home for sentimental reasons. He may not have had the slightest intention, for instance, of setting up a claim to the title and estates."

"I don't understand much about the legal aspect of this," said Viner, "but I've been wondering about it while you and the landlady talked. Supposing Ashton to be the long-lost Lord Marketstoke—could he have established a claim such as you speak of?"

"To be sure!" answered Mr. Pawle. "Had he been able to prove that he was the real Simon pure, he would have stepped into title and estates at once. Didn't the old lady say that the seventh Earl died intestate? Very well—the holders since his time, that is to say, Charles, who, his

brother's death being presumed, became eighth Earl, and his son, the present holder, would have had to account for everything since the day of the seventh Earl's death. When the seventh Earl died, his elder son, Lord Marketstoke, *ipso facto*, stepped into his shoes, and if he were, or is, still alive, he's in them still. All he had to do, at any moment, after his father's death, no matter who had come into title and estates, was to step forward and say: 'Here I am!—now I want my rights!'"

"A queer business altogether!" commented Viner. "But whoever Ashton was, he's dead. And the thing that concerns me is this: if he really was Earl of Ellingham, do you think that fact's got anything to do with his murder?"

"That's just what we want to find out," answered Mr. Pawle eagerly. "It's quite conceivable that he may have been murdered by somebody who had a particular interest in keeping him out of his rights. Such things have been known. I want to go into all that. But now here's another matter: If Ashton really was the missing Lord Marketstoke, who is this girl whom he put forward as his ward, to whom he's left his considerable fortune, and about whom nobody knows anything? I've already told you there isn't a single paper or document about her that I can discover. Was he really her guardian?"

"Has this anything to do with it?" asked Viner. "Does it come into things?"

MR. PAWLE did not answer for a moment; he appeared to have struck a new vein of thought and to be exploring it deeply.

"In certain events, it would come into it pretty strongly!" he muttered at last. "I'll tell you why, later on. Now I'm for bed—and first thing after breakfast, in the morning, Viner, we'll go to work."

Viner had little idea of what the old solicitor meant as regards going to work; it seemed to him that for all practical purposes they were already in a maze out of which there seemed no easy way. And he was not at all sure of what they were doing when, breakfast being over next morning, Mr. Pawle conducted him across the square to the old four-square churchyard, and for half an hour walked him up one path and down another and in and around the ancient yew-trees and gravestones.

"Do you know what I've been looking for, Viner?" asked Mr. Pawle at last as he turned towards the church porch. "I was looking for something, you know."

"Not the faintest notion!" answered Viner dismally. "I wondered!"

"I was looking," replied Mr. Pawle with a faint chuckle, "to see if I could find any tombstones or monuments in this churchyard bearing the name Ashton. There isn't one! I take it from that significant fact that Ashton didn't come down here to visit the graves of his kindred. But now come into the church—Mrs. Summers told me this morning that there's a chapel here in which the Cave-Gray family have been interred for two or three centuries. Let's have a look at it."

Viner, who had a dilettante love of ancient architecture, was immediately lost in admiration of the fine old structure into which he and his companion presently stepped. He stood staring at the high rood, the fine old rood-screen, the beauty of the clustered columns—had he been alone, and on any other occasion, he would have spent the morning in wandering around nave and aisles and transepts. But Mr. Pawle, severely practical, at once made for the northeast chapel; and Viner, after another glance round, was forced to follow him.

"The Ellingham Chapel!" whispered the old solicitor as they passed a fine old stone screen which Viner mentally registered as fifteenth-century. "No end of Cave-Grays laid here. What a profusion of monuments!"

Viner began to examine those monuments as well as the gloom of the November morning and the dark-painted glass of the windows would permit. And before very long he turned to his companion, who was laboriously reading the inscription on a great box-tomb which stood against the north wall.

"I say!" he whispered. "Here's a curious fact which, in view of what we heard last night, may be of use to us."

"What's that?" demanded Mr. Pawle.

Viner took him by the elbow and led him over to the south wall, on which was arranged a number of ancient tablets, grouped around a great altar-tomb whereon were set up the painted effigies of a gentleman, his wife, and several sons and daughters, all in ruffs, kneeling, one after the other, each growing less in size and stature, in the attitude of prayer. He pointed to the inscription on this, and from it to several of the smaller monuments.

"Look here!" he said. "There are Cave-

Grays commemorated here from 1570 until 1820. No end of 'em—men and women. And now, see—there's a certain Christian name—a woman's name—which occurs over and over again. There it is—and there—and here—and here—and here again; it's evidently been a favorite family name among the Cave-Gray women for three hundred years at least. You see what it is? Avice!"

Mr. Pawle peered at the various places to which his companion's finger pointed.

"Yes," he answered, "I see it—several times, as you say. Avice! Yes?"

"Miss Wickham's Christian name is Avice," said Viner.

Mr. Pawle started.

"God bless me!" he exclaimed. "So it is! I'd forgotten that. Dear me! Now, that's very odd—too odd, perhaps, to be a coincidence. Very interesting, indeed! Favorite family name without a doubt."

Viner silently went round the chapel, inspecting every monument it sheltered.

"It occurs just nineteen times," he announced at last. "Now, is it a coincidence that Miss Wickham's name should be Avice? Or is it that there's some connection between her and all these dead and gone Avices?"

"Very strange!" admitted Mr. Pawle. "Viner—we'll go next and have a look at the parish registers. But look here! Not a word to parson or clerk about our business! We merely wish to make search for a certain legal purpose, eh?"

THREE hours later Viner, heartily weary of turning over old registers full of crabbed writing, was glad when Mr. Pawle closed the one on which he was engaged, intimated that he had seen all he wanted, paid the fees for his search, and whispered to his companion that they would go to lunch.

"Well?" asked Viner as they walked across the square to the Ellingham Arms. "Have we done anything?"

"Probably!" answered Mr. Pawle. "For you never know how these little matters might help. We've established two facts, anyway. One—that there have never been any folk of the name of Ashton in this town since the registers came into being in 1567; the other, that the name Avice was a very favorite one indeed amongst the women of the Cave-Gray family. And there's just another little fact which I discovered, and said nothing about while the vicar and the clerk were about—it may be nothing, and it may be something."

"What is it?" asked Viner.

"Well," answered Mr. Pawle, pausing a few yards away from the porch of the hotel, and speaking in a confidential voice, "it's this: In turning up the records of the Cave-Gray family, as far as they are shown in their parish registers, I found that Stephen John Cave-Gray, sixth Earl of Ellingham, married one Georgina Wickham. Now, is that another coincidence? There you get the two names in combination—Avice Wickham. That particular Countess of Ellingham would, of course, be the grandmother of the Lord Marketstoke who disappeared. Did he think of her maiden name, Wickham, when he wanted a new one for himself? Possibly! And when he married, and had a daughter, did he think of the Christian name so popular with his own womenfolk of previous generations, and call his daughter Avice? And are Marketstoke and Wickham and Ashton all one and the same man?"

"Upon my word, it's a strange muddle!" exclaimed Viner.

"Nothing as yet to what it will be," remarked Mr. Pawle sententiously. "Come on—I'm famishing. Let's lunch—and then we'll go back to town."

ANOTHER surprise awaited them when they walked into Mr. Pawle's office in Bedford Row at four o'clock that afternoon. A card lay on the old lawyer's blotting-pad, and after glancing at it, he passed it to Viner.

"See that?" he said. "Now, who on earth is Mr. Armitstead Ashton Armitstead, of Rouendale House, Rawtenstall? Who left this?" he went on, as a clerk entered the room with some letters.

"A gentleman who called at three o'clock, sir," replied the clerk. "He said he's traveled especially from Lancashire to see you about the Ashton affair. He's going to call again, sir, in fact," concluded the clerk, glancing into the anteroom, "I think he's here now."

"Bring him in," commanded Mr. Pawle. He made a grimace at Viner as the clerk disappeared. "You see how things develop," he murmured. "What are we going to hear next?"

The next installment of this captivating novel will appear in the next—the June—issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

"Save the Mail or Die"

A thrilling story of the airplane mail-service and its quick-thinking Marine guard.

By CHARLES PHELPS CUSHING

PRIVATE PLUTARCH JONES, late of the Marine guard of the battleship *Pennsylvania,* sat solitary in the late afternoon sunshine outside the U. S. Mail airplane hangars of Omaha, squinting down his rifle-barrel and smiling grimly. A picture, that hard-boiled leatherneck, to strike terror to the heart of any mail-bandit. But Plutarch, at the moment, wasn't thinking of bandits at all. Desperate with loneliness, he was striving not to betray his true emotions, and his smile was not murderous but grimly philosophical. As he put down his rifle across his knees he muttered savagely:

"Well—serves you right, Plute! Let this be a lesson to you. Never volunteer! Never again for *anything!*"

He gulped hard and stared out across the flying field to where half a dozen oil-bespattered mechanics in brown overalls were pushing a big mail biplane out of its hangar and pointing its nose into the wind—a mournful west wind from off the prairies that moaned through the telegraph-wires into Plutarch's nautical ears with a note strangely touching, for it was like the old familiar moan of the ocean.

"Marooned!" he choked. "Hard aground, and stuck forever!"

A thousand miles from tidewater now, at the halfway station of the transcontinental air-mail, he sat despondent, cut off for he knew not how many dreary days from all his carefree mates, the soldiers of the sea. And no one to blame for it all but himself! For he, none other, Plutarch Jones, the hard-boiled duty-dodger and eminent sea-lawyer, with three hash-marks on his left sleeve as tokens of experience in the service, had gone and done it and wished it on himself, by volunteering for a detail.

"Aw, get busy and forget it!" he growled.

WITH a worn scrap of emery paper he began industriously to polish the butt-plate of his rifle. But he couldn't forget. As he bent over the piece and scrubbed, flashes of reflected sunlight glistened up into his downcast eyes from the bright brass buttons of his cherished "sea-goin' blues," reminding him once more of his rash impulsiveness.

Aye, even now—he glanced at his watch,

and it read six-twenty—he might be foregathering below-decks after chow with his happy webfoot bunkies of the good old flagship, with the smoking-lamp aglow. Aye, even now he might be regaling them with certain quaint bits of anecdote and philosophy culled from the justly famous writings of his ancient namesake, that grand old man Plutarch, the Greek—one of the wisest guys that ever lived.

He gulped again. The mechanics were tuning up that infernal airplane's engine now, and it made such a roar that a fellow could hardly hear himself think. And in another ten minutes he would be up in the air in the thing, risking his fool neck at dizzy heights behind a half-baked kid pilot with a mop of yellow hair parted in the middle and a lisping accent like a limey's. And maybe Jesse James and his gang and all the other mail-bandits would be taking pot-shots at him as he winged his way across the lonesome prairies. No life for a seafarin' man. No life at all!

But it served him dead right. All the old hard-boiled leathernecks, from his first day at a boot camp, had warned him time and again: "Sit tight, kid. Keep your blue blouse on. Never volunteer for a detail. Never step out for *anything!*" Yet he, Plutarch Jones, as hard-boiled now as the next man, named after a philosopher and proud of it, had stepped right out with the rest of the poor fish when the old man had mustered the *Pennsylvania's* Marine guard on deck that unhappy morning and had asked for volunteers to chaperon some mail-sacks. That was only a week ago—but it seemed a year.

He could hear the old man appealing to them now, even above the roar of that dang machine. "Willie Pull-Through," they called their skipper, because he was too slim and straight to be a ramrod, and because nothing is slimmer and straighter than a ramrod except the pull-through string you use to swab out a rifle-bore. He could see Willie Pull-Through there again, rooted to the *Pennsy's* deck as stiff and tall as a flagstaff, and hear him again, putting the proposition up to them almost like a dare:

"THE Secretary of the Navy," he is saying, "calls for a thousand Marines to guard the mails from bandits. Men, this is a difficult and dangerous guard-duty, and I don't want to ship anybody from this detachment on it unless he volunteers. You men remember the Secretary. He used to be a Marine. Here is his message."

Then he breaks out a chit and reads it solemnly:

" 'There is no compromise in this battle with bandits. If two Marines, guarding a mail-car, are suddenly covered by a robber, neither must hold up his hands, but both must begin shooting. One may be killed, but the other will get the robber and save the mail. The mail must be delivered, or there must be a dead Marine at the post of duty. Keep your weapons in hand, and if attacked, shoot, and shoot to kill.' Get it? See what you're up against? This is a man-sized job.

"Now, I want twelve volunteers from this company for guard duty," the old man ends. "Volunteers to save the mail or die! Step three paces forward at the word of command, if you care to volunteer. Stand fast if you don't. Now—

"For-r-rward—*march!*"

Then, sharply: "*Company*—halt!"

A broad grin wreathes Captain Willie Pull-Through's weatherbeaten features now, for he has all the volunteers his heart could wish. From among this rich selection he then picks out his quota of a dozen, Private Plutarch Jones one of the first among them.

So down the old flagship's side that afternoon goes Plutarch. Over his shoulder a sea-bag—but destined for far inland prairies. And the next day he finds himself one of a thousand brash leathernecks who have gathered on the wind-swept parade grounds of old Quantico Barracks above the Potomac, the dusty old field worn bare by the hob-nailed shoes of many another battalion of volunteers no less hardy and impulsive. The stories it could tell of crosses—wooden ones and bronze—that Quantico parade-ground!

AT Quantico the thousand were drawn up in ranks, and they heard again that slogan, "Save the mail or die!" And from there they were scattered that night to all the winds. Everywhere over the land they were whisking now, aboard mail trucks in dark city streets, in railway post-office cars speeding across the country, and in roaring airplanes diving through the clouds.

And thus it was that Plutarch Jones, old salt of the sea salty, found himself so far from tidewater, a guard of the air-mail on the run from Omaha to Cheyenne.

"Such was the solicitude of Pericles, when he had to speak in public," relates the much-thumbed volume that Plutarch Jones always carries in the breast pocket of his sea-goin' blues, "that he always first addressed a prayer to the gods, 'That not a word escape him unsuitable to the occasion.'"

Such was the solicitude of Plutarch Jones on this particular occasion that he was moved to raise his right hand to the heavens into which he was about to soar, and to make this solemn vow:

"Never again, Plute! Never again!"

PACING like a caged hyena back and forth in front of the hangars, the flustered young pilot of the Omaha-Cheyenne 'plane, from out of the tail of his restless eyes, caught Plutarch's gesture—and hopefully mistook its meaning. On the double, his yellow hair flying, he hastened over.

"I say, Jones," he gasped, peering anxiously skyward, "can you really see him?"

"See who?"

"The Chicago mail."

"When is he due?"

"Six-twenty-five."

Plutarch Jones swept the eastern skies with a searching gaze and fixed it finally upon a black dot about half as big as a flyspeck in the distant blue. Then he nodded with apparent unconcern.

"There,"—he pointed,—"nor'east-by-east, sir."

"You're right, Jones. Good eye, I say! Well, let's shake a leg and be all ready for him."

Plutarch glanced up at that suggestion with an air of shocked surprise and mild reproof. The inborn instinct of a sea lawyer to quibble about any debatable point was instantly aroused in him. He would give this officious youth a battle.

"Orders are, we shove off at six-thirty sharp," he objected. "Sorry, sir, but that leaves a good nine minutes yet. I'm cleaning my rifle."

A swift flush of anger mounted to the young pilot's cheeks, and his nervous fingers tightened suddenly around a bit of yellow paper—a telegram, Plutarch observed.

The pilot was crumpling the telegram.

"Have a heart, Jones!" he pleaded. "You've been fussing around with that rifle for half an hour. When I was a cadet, I used to do mine in five minutes."

Plutarch shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't help that, sir, and I don't take orders from you till I go aboard. As Zeuxis once told Agatharcus the lightnin' sketch-artist, you gimme a bum argument—or words to that effect. 'If I boast,' he says, 'it shall be of the slowness with which I finish mine.'"

The pilot's eyebrows went up, and from hot impatience his tone changed to chilly sarcasm:

"Well, my friend, if there's anything I can do to help you speed things up, pray speak. I'm always at your service."

"Just one thing you can do, young fellow. Diogenes sprung this once on Alex the Great. 'Only stand a little out of my sunshine,' he says. And the same goes for you."

The color went out of the pilot's cheeks, and he stared at the leatherneck dumbly, in a quandary whether to laugh or to swear.

Plutarch Jones, meanwhile, deftly rolled a cigarette with his left hand, and with the thumbnail of his right clipped the head of a match to strike a light.

Ten feet away he spied a fuzzy caterpillar crawling lazily across a block of cement. Taking careful aim, Plutarch flicked the lighted match at the caterpillar and dropped it neatly in a flaming arc a sixteenth of an inch behind the fuzzy worm's last section—close enough, in fact, to singe it. Like a miniature camel, the frightened caterpillar humped himself away.

"Good trick, aint it?" Plutarch demanded, grinning.

THE pent-up emotions of the agitated pilot suddenly released themselves in a burst of hysterical laughter. Gasping at the end of it, he abruptly checked himself and grew grave again. This time he made a different sort of appeal:

"Look here, Jones, you're a good fellow, and we two are going to be shipmates. We oughtn't to quarrel. See here, now—I'm going to lay my cards face up on the table." He smoothed out the crumpled telegram as he spoke, and handed it over. "Every minute that I can gain on this flight today is precious. Read this, and you'll see why. It's—it's about—well, see for yourself. And I'm scared stiff about it."

Plutarch gave the message a swift inspection and understood why. It was a

telegram sent over commercial wires from Salt Lake City at one P. M. from a hotel address, and signed simply "Buzz." It read:

> Ruth's condition serious but doctors hopeful. Crisis probably tonight. Am picking up later news at Cheyenne. Meet me at North Forks, same place, nine-thirty. Don't worry.

The Marine jumped to his feet with a snap, quick sympathy in every line of his wrinkled, sea-weathered features.

"Mighty sorry, sir," he apologized. "Why didn't you spring it on me sooner? Well, let's go!"

Three minutes later, when the Chicago mail came roaring in and flitted to a standstill close beside the Cheyenne 'plane, the anxious young pilot was all set to shove off, and Plutarch Jones sat dutifully alert in the cockpit behind him, with his rifle between his knees while he hooked up the collar of his overcoat.

One of Plutarch's leatherneck brotherhood was aboard the craft from Chicago and hailed him heartily. While the mail-sacks were being transferred, the pair exchanged brief dialogue.

A small steel chest was the last freight passed across.

"Glad to get that ditty-box off my hands, I don't mind tellin' you," the guard from Chicago remarked with a long-drawn sigh.

"Why?" Plutarch demanded.

"Why? Oh, you don't know, then?" came the answer in a mocking drawl. "Well, they tell me there's a ration of salt horse and punk in it, and some Java, and maybe a hunk o' Swiss cheese for John D. Rockefeller's breakfast. And he's gonna be all upset, they say, if he don't get it tomorrow O. K. Anyhow, that's what the coxswain of this airship tells me. Well, Plute, *adios!* See you some more on Thursday if you get back all alive. Save the—"

The rest of his sentence was drowned in the roar of the Cheyenne 'plane's propellers. Grin and all, he suddenly whisked by and vanished, for like a mammoth dragon fly, the 'plane which bore Plutarch Jones in its observer's seat went skimming now across the aviation field, took a hop and began to soar.

Against Plutarch's cheeks a hurricane was driving. The field below began to shrink, the earth to drop away and flatten out, and the air to grow suddenly frosty. Louder roared the hurricane. Looking back over his shoulder in farewell, Plute saw the windows of the skyscrapers in the distant city of Omaha glowing with sunset reflections as if afire, and the church spires sticking up through a low haze of blue smoke. Beyond coiled the shining river. Far away, at the rim of the horizon, he could make out Council Bluffs in faint silhouette. Below lay endless reaches of checkerboard brown and green fields, with white threads of roads, and ant-like motor-cars creeping along them.

Then he turned, sighed and stared ahead. The machine was plunging, roaring, diving onward straight toward the red disk-target of the sinking sun, over the endless plains.

PLUTARCH JONES sat rigid in the observer's seat, every muscle of his body tense, his ear-drums paralyzed by the din of the engines, and cold chills chasing one another up his spine.

Swiftly the airplane skimmed the clouds and sped onward toward the straight black line of the horizon. The big red disk toward which they were hurtling was slowly sinking out of sight. Yes, and every second the air was getting colder.

Long he must have sat there in a coma, thinking only of how cold he was and of how his teeth chattered, and whisking through nothing toward nowhere. He felt no impulse to talk, and knew that if he did speak, the pilot could not hear him in that dreadful din. He was dumb, numb all over and almost paralyzed. This was the end for sure!

How the moon—and a big full moon, at that—sneaked up from behind and was shining bright before he noticed it, was not hard to account for under the circumstances. Coming out of his trance to peer down over the side, he saw the river emerging again silvery from the murk—a broad, graceful sweep now, dotted with hundreds of little islands. By this time, too, he had decided that he was so nearly frozen that he could feel no more pain. So the light seemed to cheer him.

Soon he even found himself again interested enough in life to wonder where he was and to want to take the ship's bearings. Still on the same course, heading due west, he judged, and following the river as a marker. And now he noticed that they were nearing a big forks.

"Forks—nine-thirty."

Those two words of the telegram that

had agitated his pilot so much flashed into Plutarch's mind. At that, he hastily dug into his pocket for his watch. It read nine-fifteen. They must be nearing the place.

Then, of a sudden, Plutarch's heart thumped joyously as he heard the thunder of the machine begin to diminish. The pilot was throttling down the engine. In ten minutes more, maybe, a fellow might have his feet on a good solid deck again and be warming his benumbed fingers at a camp-fire. Drinking hot Java too, perhaps.

Yep, this was the place, right enough. A great square field, as flat as a table-top, was heaving up to meet them like the platform of a mammoth freight-elevator. Not a house on it, not a light, not so much as a cow moving around. But it sure looked comforting.

THE engine had ceased its din entirely; the moonlit world was all so quiet now, except for a slight swishing of air past his ears, that Plutarch dared hope that he might again hear the sound of his own voice. So he leaned forward and touched the pilot on the shoulder.

"Makin' port?" he bellowed.

"Righto!"

"Lucky you've got a bright enough light for it."

"Oh, we haven't got light enough—not yet," the pilot answered. "But we'll get around that right away with some glim of our own. You can't judge distances by moonlight, you know."

He bent over and struck a match.

A brilliant glare of sizzling white light flared up from under the seat the next moment; then Plutarch watched what he judged to be a calcium lamp go over the side and start swiftly earthward. But before he had time to rub his dazzled eyes, he saw the lamp's speed downward abruptly checked—a little parachute opened out. Two more lights and parachutes followed quickly. Three white lamps now floated in the sky, brightening the bare field like glowing meteors.

That done, the 'plane kicked up its tail and in frantic haste began to descend. Two giddy turns of a spiral were all that Plutarch could bear to watch. He shut his eyes and he consigned his soul to Fate. His fingers tightened upon the craft's gunwale in what he believed would be a death grip.

An eternity of awful seconds later the marine felt a few mild bumps and bobbings, and the agony was over. He opened his eyes and blinked. The parachute lamps were gone from the sky, but in the moonlight that shimmered on the 'plane's main-deck he saw his pilot scrambling out over the side.

Not to be behindhand in so joyful a proceeding as that, Plutarch hastily pushed his rifle aside and gathering up his benumbed legs for a mighty effort, followed suit by vaulting. So four boot-heels struck the prairie turf at just about the same moment.

Just as they struck, two clumps of brush close by rose suddenly—rose to a height of about six feet and shed a camouflage of leaves.

The moonlight now was glinting on two menacing rifle-barrels, one of them aimed straight at Plutarch's wishbone.

A harsh voice barked:

"Hands up! And be quick about it!"

UP shot Plutarch's arms, swiftly, automatically. His heart had plumped down like a lump of lead and smacked him in the stomach. It all had happened in a fine fraction of a second—too quick to think.

Think? But he was thinking now. Swift thoughts, all bitter!

Sidewise, he glanced quickly at the pilot. That youth's hands were up too. No hope there!

A sweet pair of dumbbells, he and that pilot. "Save the mail or die!" they would. But the next minute they buzz straight into a spider's web and quit without a quiver. Fall for a phoney message, too, without so much as a question about it. And tonight of all times—with that steel chest aboard. *Disgrace*—that's what it meant! And maybe the naval prison, for failing to obey instructions. "Keep your weapons in hand," the order said, "and if attacked, shoot, and shoot to kill!" A fine mess he'd made of it. Skipper Willie Pull-Through and the guard of the *Pennsy* would sure feel proud of him.

The tall, raw-boned bandit who had Plutarch covered began to chuckle as he watched the marine's face grow longer and more forlorn.

"That's a pretty blue blouse you have on, buddy," he drawled, sarcastically. "Maybe you're one of those Marines sent out to guard the mails? Yes, you *must* be."

Plutarch's jaw set hard. He made no answer.

"Maybe you can give me a nice brass button off of your pretty blouse," the bandit sneered. "Just something to remember you by? You might as well, you know. When they ship you to the Portsmouth brig, they'll cut off all the rest. So what's a button or two now?"

"I guess I can't tell *you* much about that brig," the Marine countered. "Since you know so much about it, you'd better tell *me*. How's the chow there?"

The bandit's teeth flashed in a grin from under the black mask that covered his eyes.

"Smart little fellow, aint you? Just the kind I need right now to help me on fatigue. Keep your hands up! *Way up*, I say, or I'll blow hell outa you. Now, then! Listen to orders:

"Atten-*shun!*

"About, *face!*

"Forward, *march!*

"One—two—three—four! One—two—three—four! Step right out—and make it snappy!"

Private Jones obeyed. His not to reason why, his but to do or die. He stepped right out, and made it snappy. What else could a namesake of the sagacious Plutarch do under the circumstances?

But as he marched he pondered. And pondering, he recalled, as a crumb of comforting philosophy, a marked passage in the much thumbed copy of "Plutarch's Lives" which he always carried in the breast pocket of his sea-goin' blues.

The paragraph in point relates the retort of one Nicodemus the Messenian, who when he was accused of spinelessness and double-crossing because he had changed masters, argued thus:

"He did not contradict himself, for it was always the best way to listen to the strongest."

ONE of the wisest guys that ever lived, that old Plutarch. A fellow could find something in his writings suitable to any occasion. Never, never, had the book failed Private Jones in any big emergency of his eventful past.

Yet it began to look now as if an awful crisis loomed ahead. For what hint could a Greek moralist who died about eighteen hundred years ago be able to furnish on how to handle bandits who hold up flying machines?

Something, at last, that was undreamt of in ancient philosophy!

THE bandit kept on barking out commands as he marched the Marine briskly across the moonlit field.

"Column left, *march!*

"Left oblique, *march!*

"Forward, *march!*"

Plutarch's first notion was that he was being drilled merely as a jest. But before he had paced off another hundred yards, he perceived that the bandit was marching him in a definite direction, straight toward what appeared, from a distance, to be a leaf-covered mound.

A little closer, and Plutarch could make out what this really was—a small black monoplane covered with a light net of camouflage.

"Detail, *halt!*"

They had come up with it now.

"Lend a hand here, mate," the bandit ordered sharply. "Heave off this net. Roll her up shipshape. Then drop her here alongside."

Plutarch obeyed smartly.

"Now back to where we came from. Double-time, *march!*"

On the run they returned.

The bandit was panting hard when they brought up again beside the mail-'plane. But he paused not for rest.

"Better get aboard, Limey," he bade his accomplice, "and give her the gas. We got to move this mail 'bus up closer to old Black Oswald and transfer some cargo." Then, wheeling on his captives:

"And you, Percy," he bellowed savagely at Plutarch's shivering pilot, "crank 'er up! Let's go!"

Half a minute later the mail-'plane taxied across the field.

Plutarch and "Percy" trailed after it, marching with their hands aloft while the tall bandit strode behind them shouting commands.

"Detail, *halt!* At ease!"

The bandit was enjoying himself hugely. His teeth showed in a continuous grin.

"Well, Limey," he again addressed his accomplice, who was now getting down out of the mail-'plane, "what's the good word now? All set?"

"Limey" ambled over to the black monoplane without replying. Deliberately he climbed aboard and began inspecting the gauges. It was two minutes before he broke silence.

"I say, old chap," he sighed, "we ought to pinch their petrol. We're running beastly low on petrol."

"On which?"

"Naptha, don't you know. The bally motive-power of the machine."

"Oh, you mean gas? All right! We'll take all they've got."

THE tall bandit nodded briskly at Plutarch.

"Another little job for you, leatherneck. All hands to the pumps. We've got to pinch your naptha."

"Naptha"—something stirred in the depths of Plutarch's memory at that. "Naptha?" Where had he heard that word before? "Naptha?" By the shades of the Great Alex, it was somewhere in "Plutarch's Lives!" Give him another minute to think, and he might recall the passage.

"*Say, you!*" the bandit's voice rang harshly. "Come to life! What's eatin' you?"

"Just thinking," Plutarch parried. "Wondered how you'd take it if—if I'd ask you to lemme have a little smoke first? Haven't had a smoke for three hours."

"You can smoke afterwards," the bandit answered curtly. "Smoke all night if you like. But what I want outa you right now is action."

"Limey" had dug up a hand pump and a small tin pail. He passed them over to the tall bandit, who handed the pail to Plutarch and the pump to the young pilot.

"Now then, you two—get busy."

The pilot pumped out a pailful of gasoline from the mail-'plane's tank. Plutarch dutifully portaged it across to the other machine, pondering deeply as he went. "Naptha?" If he only could recall what that passage was!

He poured the liquid into Black Oswald's reservoirs, as directed by "Limey," and was strolling back after more when—biff! —the idea struck him in a flash. It was a passage in the chapter about Alex the Great. He had it now—a big idea, too! —a fighting chance.

"Hey, you!" the tall bandit urged, prodding the Marine in the back with his rifle. "Shake a leg, will you?"

This time Plutarch Jones obeyed with alacrity. He carried the second pailful across to Black Oswald on a dog-trot, spilling some of it in his eager haste, and slopping some over the monoplane's side onto the roll of camouflage netting as his trembling hands poured the gasoline into the tank.

The tall bandit chuckled as he noted the Marine's evident agitation.

"Atta boy!" he mocked. "Make it snappy."

Half a dozen trips in all were required to empty the mail-'plane's reservoirs. Plutarch took all these hauls on the run. He made a sloppy job of it, but no one could complain that he wasn't brisk—and speed seemed to be what was wanted most.

"Limey" glanced quickly at a wrist-watch as Plutarch finished the last haul, and immediately he began to fidget.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "We've got no time to spare. That Cheyenne chap might come dropping in now at any minute—Percy's friend Buzz, you know—the chap in the telegram? Might get suspicious and decide to land, I mean. Eh, what?"

"Sure," agreed the other. "Whaddye want to do next?"

"Let's get the bally strong-box aboard, quick. And leave the rest. The strong-box is the main thing, anyway. Eh, what?"

"All right," the tall bandit answered, and turned again toward Plutarch. "Pass up that strong-box, you!" he shouted.

NOTHING to do but obey. So Plutarch swung the little steel chest onto his shoulder, bore it across to the black monoplane and watched it stowed away amidships.

"All set now, aren't you, Limey? If you are, I'll come aboard."

"Righto!"

With that, "Limey" appeared to take command.

"Stand clear there, my man," he ordered Plutarch. "And you, Percy, give our propellers a turn, eh?"

Plutarch backed off suddenly, trampling heavily upon the young pilot's toes.

"Ouch!" the pilot screamed.

The tall bandit guffawed loudly.

Plutarch had hoped for that in his calculations.

"Stall!" he pleaded under his breath. With his back turned to the bandits, he seemed to be making fervent apology for his clumsiness. "Stall for time! Get me?"

"Wow!" The pilot evidently had got him quickly. "Wow!" He rolled on the ground, gripping his toes. Moaning, he sat up next and hastily began to unlace his right shoe.

The tall bandit laughed uproariously.

Plutarch was audible now in tender solicitude as he watched. With his left hand, meanwhile, he deftly rolled himself a cigarette.

"You poor bums! You babes in the woods!" the tall bandit gasped in merriment. "And they send out guys like you to guard the mails. Oh, my! Oh, my!"

With the thumbnail of his right hand Plutarch now clipped the head of a match to strike a light for his cigarette.

"Say, that reminds me," the bandit resumed sarcastically. "I said I wanted something to remember you by."

"You'll get it," Plutarch retorted calmly. "You'll get it *right away.*"

As he spoke, he flicked the lighted match into the air.

In a flaming arc it descended straight for a silver bull's-eye—a little pool of gasoline on the sloppy trail between the mail-'plane and the bandits' black monoplane.

Even before the match struck the pool, the gasoline flared in a gusty flame, and Plutarch threw himself flat, face downward.

Whe-ee-ew!

With the whistle of a swift wind, the flame sped along the gas-soaked ground, blazed up with a blinding flash and a roar from the gas-soaked roll of camouflage alongside the bandits' monoplane and leaped to the outspread wings.

Screams. Then an ear-splitting explosion.

When Plutarch raised himself on one elbow presently to have a look, smoke and crackling flames and a cloud of dust were all he could see of what a few seconds before had been a black monoplane with two passengers.

Five minutes later he rescued from the wreck two charred bodies and a small steel box, from which most of the paint had been scorched.

"DON'T give me the credit," Plutarch Jones explained to his admiring pilot. "Soon as I heard that word '*naptha*,' the rest was easy. It's all in 'Plutarch's Lives,' greatest little book in the world. Old stuff, you see? Happened in Ecbatana, wherever that is, about two thousand, two hundred and fifty-some years ago. I'll read you the passage, if you like. Here goes:

" 'Before any fire touches it,'—meaning naptha,—'it catches light from a flame at some distance, and often kindles all the intermediate air. The barbarians, to show the king its force and the subtilty of its nature, scattered some drops of it in the street which led to his lodgings; and standing at one end, they applied their torches to some of the first drops; for it was night. The flame communicated itself swifter than thought, and the street was instantaneously all on fire.'

"I had a cinch, you see, soon as I got the idea."

The mail-'plane from Cheyenne made a landing in the field a quarter of an hour later, not by appointment (for "Buzz," the pilot, declared he had no knowledge whatever of the telegram to which his name had been signed), but because, while he was flying over, his attention was attracted by the glowing embers of the burned monoplane.

"Sorry—but I guess we'll have to cut out our little confabs here," he sighed. "Somebody's been watching us too close."

His shipmate in the Cheyenne 'plane, a young Marine, diffidently introduced himself meanwhile to Plutarch Jones.

"Not Jones of the *Pennsy?*" the youngster exclaimed.

"Sure. But why laugh about it?" Plutarch returned.

"I'm not laughing," the other protested respectfully, eying the three service stripes on Plutarch's arm as he spoke. "I'm just glad to meet you, old-timer. I've heard a lot about you, see? You're the old-timer who always tells recruits never to volunteer for anything, and then"—this with a grin—"always is the first man to step out if the duty looks dangerous."

"So that's what they say about me?"

"That's it."

"Well, don't you ever believe 'em, kid. Scuttle-butt chatter."

Just the same, Plutarch Jones looked pleased.

With his left hand he deftly rolled a cigarette. With the thumbnail of his right he struck a match. For a moment he watched the match flare; then he flicked it in a flaming arc at a piece of debris and struck the target squarely.

"Good trick," he remarked. "A lot harder than it looks. If you don't do it *just right*, you put out the match. Try it sometime."

The Leather Medal

A bitter rivalry between two track men comes to a dramatic finish at the annual intercollegiate meet.

By MAXWELL SMITH

CROMLEY could run. No question of that! He had the record of forty-seven and two-fifths for the four-forty—his pet distance—and an unofficial record of forty-seven, equaling the straightaway time. There wasn't anyone, anywhere, could touch him. He could run—but that was about the only pleasant thing that could be said of him. As a man he was just plain ornery, mean.

Melville could run too. But he was a youngster, still with much to learn about how to get the best out of his long legs. He knew that; there was no swelling about his head, although during his time in high school he had performed conspicuously on the track. And he was anxious to learn. There was an idol before him. He went to college with as much intention of becoming a crack runner as he had of becoming a civil engineer.

The day he arrived at college his idol crashed. That was Cromley.

Until that moment there was none bigger than Cromley in Melville's eyes. His ambition—yes, his greatest ambition, was to run like Cromley, to be like Cromley. For he had pictured the champion quarter-miler as a great-hearted, lovable chap. How, he would have asked, could Cromley be otherwise? His disillusionment was rapid. The ambition to run like Cromley remained, but not the desire to be like him.

Melville was a little breathless when he presented the letter an alumnus had given him to Tim Duffy, the trainer. He lost no time in doing so. He wanted to get quickly under Duffy's wing to absorb the wisdom of the wizard athlete-builder.

Always on the lookout for promising material, Duffy received him decently enough, but without visible enthusiasm. The writer of the introduction mentioned Melville's achievements on the junior track, and Duffy saw that they were good. He merely grunted, however; he didn't believe in praising a youngster.

The trainer looked at Melville.

"You think you're pretty good, eh?" he remarked, and waited with pursed lips and prying eyes for the answer.

Melville fidgeted—he was only nineteen, and Duffy was a personage.

"Fair, Mr. Duffy," he said. "Just fair. I think—they say I can get better."

"Uh!" said Duffy noncommittally. His glance ranged over the long figure of the boy. "You're light; a few pounds more weight wouldn't hurt you. What d'you do best?"

"Two-twenty. I want—" Melville hesitated, then voiced his ambition: "I want to do the quarter like—like Cromley. He's the reason I came to Westbridge," he hurried on as Duffy smiled a bit ironically. "I want to—"

"To trim Cromley!" Duffy laughed. "You don't aim to do much, do you?" He laughed again.

"Let's see it, Duffy," said another voice over Melville's shoulder. "What is it? Where's it blown in from?"

THE contemptuous drawl made Melville turn his head, flushing. Cromley, however, was stepping in front of him, shoving the trainer out of the way. He pushed Melville back a pace and surveyed him insolently.

"You want to trim Cromley," he jeered. "Well, well! The boy's funny, Duffy."

Amazement chased the resentment from Melville's face. He could not believe his eyes, his ears. He had seen Cromley run, had worked after school-hours and saved rather laboriously, on occasion, to see Cromley. His eyes told him that this was his idol, standing within a step of him. But it was not the Cromley he had anticipated—not this sneering fellow! He shut his eyes an instant, trying to persuade himself that he was dreaming. This couldn't really be Cromley, the champion, whom he had pictured as big-hearted, generous, a sportsman. When he looked again, Cromley was laughing at him crookedly.

"What's its name, Duffy?"

"Melville," said Duffy. He looked uncomfortably at his most brilliant performer, the captain of his track-team. He was powerless to protect Melville. In his heart he was sorry for the boy, as in his heart he disliked Cromley. But Cromley was his own master; he had to be treated with gloves. He was a world's champion, and he traded on the fact that he was in a class by himself, that Duffy needed him.

Melville cooled. He looked at Cromley evenly, not with the admiration of the novice before the master as he had expected to look, but as an antagonist.

"I didn't say I was going to trim you."

"I heard you," said Cromley disagreeably.

"You heard Mr. Duffy say it," snapped the boy. "He didn't let me finish—"

"Finish now," jeered Crowley. "What were you saying?"

"Nothing." Melville would have bitten his tongue out rather than complete that long-cherished and almost expressed wish to be like Cromley. He glanced at Duffy, puzzled by his failure to substantiate him.

"'By, Mr. Duffy," said Melville. "I may see you later."

Duffy nodded but remained silent.

"Wait a minute!" Cromley caught Melville by the lapel. "What've we got here?"

BEFORE Melville could see the intention, his watch was snatched from his pocket. On the short chain were his most prized possessions—three gold medals won in interscholastic meets. Dangling beside them, the dollar watch bulked hugely.

"A flivver watch and a bunch more junk!" laughed Cromley. "The boy buys himself decorations, Duffy, to let us know he's there!"

Melville grabbed for his treasures, but his tormentor eluded him. Fists doubled, he advanced on Cromley.

"Give them to me!"

"Let's look—let's look. I'll bet they're clever."

Cromley held him off with one hand.

"Take him away, Duffy," he commanded, "till I admire this junk."

Brushing away the restraining arm, Melville raised his fist. Duffy caught it and held him back.

"Want to get thrown out of Westbridge before you're really in?" demanded Duffy. "You sure will if you start a fight now—with Cromley."

The good sense in that was clear. Nodding, Melville dropped his fist.

"If they're all like Cromley, I wont want to stay," he said. "I don't see how they could be, though."

"*Mr.* Cromley to you," rasped the champion, looking up from the inscriptions on the medals.

Melville's lips shut tight. He eyed Cromley evenly, warningly, and the demand was not pressed.

"It can run two-twenty, Duffy," said Cromley, jingling the medals against the dollar watch, which rattled tinnily. "These pretties say so, anyhow. What'd they time you on, boy? The flivver watch? Or wasn't there a clock handy that would go long enough to take the time?"

The trainer made a conciliating effort. "Say, Jim—" was as far as he got.

Deliberately Cromley tore the chain from the watch and stripped the medals from it.

Melville started forward.

"We don't allow junk like this round here, boy," said Cromley—and he flung medals, watch and chain, scattering into the grass.

Grinning meanly, he dodged the swing Melville aimed at him. Poising a second on his toes, he darted off with his easy, showy stride.

"Come on, you boy wonder," he flung back. "Come catch me."

"I will!" Melville started, but again Duffy restrained him, this time violently, by diving at his legs. Then Duffy sat on him.

"Listen," urged the trainer as his captive struggled. "Show sense. It wont get you anything but trouble to muss with Cromley. He treated you rotten, but that's nothing new. He gets away with it because he's Cromley. The faculty favors athletics—they're good advertising. See? Now forget it and—"

ONCE more Melville listened to reason. After all, he had come to college to get a diploma. He would be heading in the wrong direction if he started out with a fight with the track star. As Duffy reiterated, Melville alone would be the sufferer. Cromley could get away with it.

Melville ceased struggling. He had made a decision.

"Let me up," he said quietly.

"Be good?"

"Yes."

A hundred yards away, Melville saw Cromley talking with several others. Evidently he was retailing the story, and his hearers were laughing.

Melville turned his back.

"Where did he throw them, Mr. Duffy?"

"Over there. I'll help you." Duffy went with him and they searched among the grass. The big shiny watch was quickly found, but though several other students came along and good-naturedly aided in the hunt, only two of the medals were recovered.

Finally Melville straightened, thanking the searchers.

"It's gone for good, I guess. It—doesn't matter."

"I'll have the mower run over here in the morning," offered Duffy. He was ashamed of Cromley's behavior, and angry at himself for having caused it by putting words into Melville's mouth. He had been hasty in picking up what the boy had seemed about to say. He tried to make amends: "What shape are you in, Melville?"

The answer was civil but short: "All right."

"Come see me tomorrow—"

"Thanks." Melville attached the chain to his watch, but put the two medals in his pocket. "Thanks—but I don't think I will. I don't think I'll run any at Westbridge."

The trainer gaped. "You wont—what?"

"Run—not here." The youngster smiled wryly, but there was an emptiness within him as he announced the decision. He loved to extend himself, eating up the ground, loved the conflict of the race. But how could he run at Westbridge without coming into contact with Cromley? He did not want ever to see Cromley again—his idol who had turned out to be a prig and a bully.

"I wont have time," he added to the staring trainer. "I'll be busy studying. And you know, I'm working my way through."

With a nod he ended the conversation and walked away.

Throughout his first year he held fixedly to his determination, despite advances by Duffy to get him onto the track. He accepted with a smile the nickname "Medals" which Cromley hung on him, and carefully steered clear of Cromley's path. Practically all his time was divided between study and the boarding-house in which he waited on table. But he did not allow himself to get altogether out of condition. There were gray dawns when he sped over the cinders alone and unseen, and times when he slipped out to run in the deserted oval at midnight. So he knew that he still could go.

IT was in Mellvile's second year that Duffy first saw him in action. With a lot of poor material to draw from, Duffy

was restless. Worry over his team got him out one daybreak. In the dim light he made out the fast-moving figure on the track.

"Melville!" he exclaimed, and he drew near unobserved. He hadn't bothered to ask Melville to come out this year. He hadn't seen any use in doing so—Melville had been so long out of training.

What he saw now, however, opened his eyes wide. The precision of movement, the even-leaping stride and arm-motion, the machine-like coördination in plunging body, delighted his practiced gaze. Three times he watched the solitary runner do the quarter in good time, and he swore because he had come out without his watch. He was cramped in his hiding-place under the stand when Melville finished a slow mile, done with the evident purpose of improving his wind and limbering his muscles.

With a heavy sweater drawn on, Melville was trotting toward his dormitory when Duffy cut across the field to intercept him. He did not stop until Duffy halloed.

The trainer got straight to business.

"I'll rub you down. Come on." He swung off in the direction of the training-quarters.

Melville made no move to follow. "I'll manage, thanks," he said.

Duffy turned back. "You'll come with me," he declared with emphasis. "A man that can run like you isn't going to be a holdout in these parts. Come on."

He took Melville's arm, but the runner released himself.

"Hell," exploded Duffy, "you've got to run, Melville, whether you want to or not. It wont be for me; it wont be for yourself," he went on in the age-old appeal that bites deep when all other pleas fail: "it will be for Westbridge, Melville. Get that—for Westbridge. Don't you care anything about the old school?"

Belligerently he glared into Melville's eye, clutched him by the shoulder. Melville looked away. He had been dreading just such an appeal—for Westbridge! For the spirit of the college had crept into his blood, so that he was fired with pride of it. Nevertheless—

"I'm getting chilly, Mr. Duffy," he said. "I'll run along."

"You'll run along with me," snapped Duffy. "Don't be a fool. You're being a sorehead when Westbridge needs you. We're going to get slaughtered on the track this year, Melville. All I've got is a bunch of dubs—and Cromley. With you and Cromley—"

Realizing that mention of Cromley was unfortunate, he stopped.

Melville smiled frostily. The track candidates weren't all as bad as Duffy made out, but he knew that in the aggregate they didn't amount to much. The old ambition to run for Westbridge, to rank perhaps with Cromley, flared afresh. He wanted to yield then and there, but there was one thing which held him back. He spoke of that item, which was current gossip but never before had been referred to by him, in announcing his terms.

"Get me the medal that was lost when Cromley threw them away," he stipulated, "and I'll run."

Duffy bit his lip. He tried to dodge.

"How can I—"

"Yes, you can," interrupted Melville. "I know where it is. You know. Everybody knows. When I get it back, I'll come out."

"I'll try," said Duffy shortly; but he doubted his ability to meet the condition. He knew, as Melville stated, where the medal could be located. It was the prime joke of Cromley and his few cronies. Set in the center of a big circle of leather, it occupied a prominent position on the wall of Cromley's room!

"I'll try," repeated Duffy doubtfully. "Now let me rub you down."

"When I get the medal," said Melville; and as on their first meeting he left the trainer standing.

"Hell!" spoke Duffy pithily. "I need that boy. I'll get his damn medal if I have to use an ax. Yes sir!"

And Duffy's eyes flickered with an idea.

IN making his demand upon Cromley, —a proceeding over which Duffy himself was considerably amazed, so long had he tolerated the arrogance of his star,—the trainer took a different tack than the plea he had made to Melville. He did not ask Cromley to give up the medal and so bring Melville into the field for the glory of Westbridge. The champion quarter-miler wasn't deeply concerned in the glory of Westbridge. His own glory was what interested him. Wherefore Duffy made his attack along that line when his request was refused.

"Give up the leather medal!" hooted Cromley. "I'll say not! Is the little boy crying for it?"

"No; he isn't crying. I want you to let him have it. He's going to run for us when he gets it."

Cromley wagged his head dolorously.

"Then he wont run, Duffy. Too bad—too bad; and here I am just craving to be trimmed. Don't let him kid you, Duffy."

The trainer's jaw set. Having started, he was going through with it. Stifling his misgivings, he exerted pressure.

"In that case you wont run either, Cromley," he asserted bluntly. "I need that boy. He can travel. I've seen him. If he isn't on the team, you wont be."

Cromley stared, his sneer clouded with bewilderment as he realized that he was being threatened. Then he laughed loudly, confidently. Of course Duffy was bluffing. He couldn't, daren't, bar him.

Duffy read his thought.

"I mean that," he said. "You wont run for Westbridge unless Melville gets a chance to make the team. It's up to you."

"What do I care whether I run?" stormed Cromley; but he knew, and Duffy knew, that he did care mightily. He ran not only for the plaudits but because his mean spirit reveled in the humbling of his competitors. He liked to see them strain to the utmost but in vain as he dragged them down to defeat. His vanity flashed out. "I don't want to run—I'm only helping you out. What would you have without me? A bunch of dubs who can't keep themselves warm. Go get Melville, or whatever his name is. I'm out."

"That's right," nodded Duffy. "You're out."

Abruptly he turned on his heel. Having come to a show-down, he was going the whole way. That was the only means of bringing Cromley to time. The least show of weakening, and Cromley would be in the saddle again.

Anger swept over Cromley as he saw the position he was in. This was his last year at Westbridge; he already had held over a year to get his diploma. It was his last opportunity to demonstrate his superiority in the intercollegiate. If he did not run, it would be said that he had gone back, that he had lost his speed. He couldn't bear that. His vain pride demanded that he retain his laurels to the end. He had to run.

What he was letting himself in for flashed upon him. Should his suspension be put into effect, he would have a double helping of humble pie to eat. In addition to returning the medal to Melville, he would have to ask for reinstatement. The whole college would know that he had been forced to crawl.

"Duffy!"

The trainer looked around inquiringly.

"I'll do it," grated Cromley. He laughed viciously as he perceived a way of hitting back. "And I'll break the heart of your cub. I'll make a monkey out of him."

"Do that," said Duffy, "if you can." Right then he disliked Cromley more whole-heartedly than ever. "I'll take the medal to him."

"I'll send it."

"That's good enough." Duffy went on. As a runner, Cromley was a wonder; but as a man he was— Duffy said it.

The circumstances attending the return of the medal did not modify his opinion.

Melville was at his task of waiting on table in the boarding-house when a messenger approached him. A tray in each hand, Melville stopped in the middle of the crowded dining-room.

The messenger opened a bag he carried and took out a leather disk with the little gold medal inset.

"For you," he said, proffering it.

There was a howl of laughter from the diners. Melville flushed, and a plate slid off one of his trays, the shattering china attracting those who had not yet observed the byplay.

Melville curbed his temper. The easiest way was to pass the affair off lightly.

"All right," he said with a laugh. "Pin it on me—my hands are busy."

During the rest of the meal he wore the leather medal gravely, taking in good part the many sallies regarding it. His attitude took the edge off the ridicule in which Cromley had hoped to submerge him. But he was mad clear through. And like Duffy, he also formed an idea.

MELVILLE proved to be both a delight and a disappointment to Duffy. As he rounded into form he stepped the two-twenty in but a fraction over record time. But that appeared to be all he could do. He was slow in getting off the mark and therefore useless in the dashes. Beyond three hundred yards he couldn't hold his pace.

"Go at the quarter again, son," Duffy would say. "If you can make it—"

Duffy never finished that remark, but Melville understood what was in his mind.

He too was anxious to carry on through the quarter-mile. His wish was fathered by the same thought as Duffy's. Though it never had been put into words, he knew why he was being so persistently groomed for the four-forty. But try as he would, he couldn't bring his time under forty-nine. And Cromley had an unofficial record of forty-seven!

"It's no use, Mr. Duffy," he said as the big meet drew near. "I can't make it. I can bring home the two-twenty for you, I think, but that's about all."

Cromley heard that.

"Why don't you get a crutch," he jeered. "You need something to help you get along. How about trimming Cromley!"

Melville didn't speak. Duffy did; he was sick of Cromley's petty spirit.

"There's time enough yet, Cromley."

"Like hell there is!" The star ground his spikes venomously into the cinders. Duffy was crowding him too far. This laboring to make Melville a quarter-miler had an all too-evident purpose. Perhaps—Cromley also got an idea.

"Why don't you let the pup run against me if you think he's so good?" he snarled. "I'll tear the legs off him any time his yellow streak will let him come out."

"Now!" said Melville quickly.

"Not now," vetoed Duffy emphatically. "We'll take you up on that later, Cromley. Come on, Melville. You've got to learn to get off your mark faster. You can do it. Don't be afraid of beating the gun. On your mark. Get set—"

For an hour he kept his man springing again and again to the get-away.

FOUR days later Duffy ran them at three hundred yards. Cromley went to the mark crowing and baiting his opponent. Melville went grimly quiet, intent about his task, ignoring the palpable effort to get his goat.

They got away together on the gun. Side by side they reached the hundred. At the two hundred Melville threw in that reserve power which so often had carried him to victory in the two-twenty. In a flying headlong spurt he drew a yard ahead.

The disappearance of Cromley from the neck-and-neck position at his shoulder sent a thrill through his pounding blood. He had the champion behind him—behind him. If he could keep him there—keep him there. His flying feet pattered the refrain. If he could—

At his shoulder again he heard Cromley's chugging breath. He shut his eyes. This was two-twenty he was running, he told himself—two-twenty. He still had to make his spurt, that final call upon all his energy which would fling him over these last few yards to breast the tape a winner. The last twenty yards—

He was fooling himself, but he did it well. Wildly exhilarated, drunk with a passion to beat Cromley, he drove on, persuading himself that a hundred yards was twenty.

A shout of astonishment from the few spectators made him open his eyes. His lungs bursting, he came to a stop. The broken wool was fluttering down in the faint breeze. Duffy was running toward him. He heard his name amid a chorus of amazement. Looking at Cromley, mouth wide and panting, face convulsed with fury, he knew that he had done it!

Swooping down on him, Duffy forgot for the moment his rule of being sparing in praise. Others crowded round, clamoring congratulations.

"Thirty-one and two-fifths," yelled Duffy.

"Did I win?" gasped Melville.

"Win! By a yard and going away. You—"

CROMLEY was out of the picture, but he thrust himself in.

"It was a fluke," he raged. "I held down. I didn't think he could make it. If I hadn't thought he'd crack— It was a fluke. He couldn't do it again. Put him at the quarter—that's a man's distance. He couldn't do it again."

He was beside himself, protesting shrilly, squeakily, with choking breath, his arms waving.

"You're on at the quarter tomorrow," said Duffy. He forgot the honors which Cromley had brought Westbridge, honors which he had rejoiced over because he too shared in them as the trainer of a champion. He forgot that he was dependent upon Cromley to bring further honors this season. He remembered only that he had just witnessed the puncturing of the pride of an arrogant and selfish man who never had been sportsmanlike in his triumphs and was not a sportsman in defeat.

"The time doesn't show that you held down, Cromley," he said curtly. He closed the argument: "Get in to the rubbers, men."

MOST of the students turned out on the following day for what might turn out to be an even more sensational spectacle. The hope was general that Melville would win at Cromley's own distance. The hope was unfulfilled.

Cromley got a slight advantage at the start and held it throughout. Up to the three hundred Melville was on his heels, but at that point he faltered. The finish, in 47 3/5, found him trailing by four yards.

"What do you think of your wonder now?" gloated Cromley to Duffy. "A flash in the pan; that's what he was yesterday. He's a yellow, I tell you. He hasn't the guts to take him through. You saw him go into the ruck, didn't you?" Cromley laughed disagreeably. "Go listen to his excuses. I'll bet he's full of 'em."

Melville, however, had no excuses. He shook his head when some of the spectators intimated that Cromley deliberately had blocked him, menaced him with his spikes when he might have taken the lead. He offered no explanation of that faltering stride after the passing of the three hundred-mark that had cost him valuable distance.

"When you swerved then," said one of the more outspoken, "it looked as if you were going to pass him and that you darn nearly got spiked. His feet were flying wide."

"It looked that way to me," said Duffy.

Melville shrugged. "I didn't notice," was his only comment.

He walked over to Cromley.

"I'll go you again," he challenged quietly.

Cromley looked him over impudently, a vicious glint in his eye.

"You're becoming a nuisance," he rasped. He was under no misapprehension regarding his own unpopularity. "Think you're making a hit with the gallery, don't you? Sure, we'll go it again. I'll break your heart if you don't break your own neck."

As they took their marks after a rubdown and rest, Cromley turned up his feet and looked musingly at his spikes.

"You're a nuisance," he repeated softly, so that none but Melville heard. "And nuisances should be removed."

Then they were off.

Melville had the inside position rounding the turn. Cromley was close at his side, crowding him to the four-inch board bordering the inside of the track.

Fighting for room, Melville still was careful not to foul his opponent. Glancing sidewise, he met Cromley's eye. In that instant he put a meaning into the remark the other had made just before the start—about the removal of nuisances! But he thought of it too late.

Cromley's teeth bared. He ground out an epithet. His elbow smashed heavily into Melville's short ribs.

With a grunt of pain Melville wobbled in his stride. His arm flung out spasmodically and struck Cromley's shoulder. They bumped together—and Cromley's spikes came down, ripping Melville's right calf.

The race, only half run, ended there. Melville was going on though blood was flowing from his leg, but Cromley halted, exclaiming furiously that he had been fouled.

And that was how it seemed to the spectators. All had seen Melville's arm land on Cromley's shoulder. None had seen Cromley strike Melville in the ribs, the act which precipitated the collision.

"He shoved me and tried to pass on the inside," vociferated Cromley. "That's how he got spiked. I couldn't help it."

Melville kept himself in control. He discovered quickly that the elbowing had passed unnoticed. Having mentioned it and been called a liar by Cromley, he held his tongue.

DUFFY stopped the squabble. He was worried about the lacerating of Melville's leg; the tendons might be injured.

The trainer was examining the ragged spike-wounds while waiting the arrival of a doctor when Melville stated the truth as a preliminary to a conclusion the incident had forced upon him.

"Here's a bruise I didn't have before that race," he said, exposing a reddening splotch on his ribs. "That's where Cromley elbowed me when he found he couldn't crowd me off the track."

"I saw that he was doing his best to keep you in quarters," said Duffy slowly. He frowned over the unmistakably fresh bruise. "I guess Cromley's the liar," he added seriously. "I'll suspend him."

"No!" Melville's eyes narrowed. "Let him stay. But—I'm going into the four-forty at the intercollegiate. I've an ordinary chance of drawing easy company in the heat. If I can reach the final—with Cromley." He smiled at the prospect.

Doubtfully, Duffy shook his head.

"My leg isn't hurt much," said Melville.

He flexed the muscles as proof. "There's ten days for it to heal. Then I'll get an honest crack at Cromley, Mr. Duffy, at a time that he'll like it least."

CROMLEY swore when he learned that his malicious attempt had failed to cripple Melville. He raved when he heard that his rival was entered in the quarter-mile at the big meet. He threatened to withdraw, but well knew that he could not without branding himself as afraid of Melville.

The safe margin by which Melville won his heat in the four-forty and his cool confidence, increased Cromley's black anger. So did the ease with which he captured the final of the two-twenty in within a fifth of a second of the record. These victories certainly did not lessen the morale of Melville, who as Cromley thoroughly understood, was out to get him.

Of the two others in the four-forty final—Livingston of Knightson, and Kelly of Dittfield—Cromley had an eye only for Livingston. Here, he admitted was a serious contender.

It was then that Cromley cursed the handicap of being on unfriendly terms with Melville. Given a teammate who was in harmony with him, he could have his partner kill off Livingston. He could expect no such assistance from Melville.

Yet it was typical of his insolence that he sought to exercise his authority as track captain.

"Take Livingston away with you," he ordered Melville as they went to the mark. "I'll lie back till you wear him down—you can do it in the three hundred."

The effrontery made Melville gasp. He laughed.

"Keep going for all you're worth, Cromley," he said, "if you want to be in the money! You'll have to run to finish third!"

There was no opportunity for further talk, but as they got set, Cromley shot a look of frank hatred past the runner who had the position between them. A minute later he was heeding the warning Melville had given and was straining to keep the terrific pace.

From the gun, Livingston made a race of it. Halfway, he and Melville were abreast. Cromley, forced to run wide on the turn, was a full yard behind. Kelly was barely holding on, a two-yard gap separating him from the others.

At the three hundred Melville looked and saw daylight behind Livingston. He tried to lengthen his stride, to hurl himself faster over the cinders, but already he was giving all he had. He couldn't pull up beside Livingston.

Over his shoulder he threw a lightning glance. Livingston didn't matter. Cromley was the man he had to beat.

There was Cromley, almost at his side. Ahead—forty—thirty—twenty yards, was the finish-mark. Cromley was at his side, Livingston half a yard in front..

Melville shut his eyes as he had done that day he defeated Cromley. That had been sweet. To outstrip him now before the thousands who packed the stadium would be infinitely sweeter.

Strangling for breath, his aching, overtaxed muscles protesting, Melville told himself again that he was finishing the two-twenty. He heard the swelling roar from the stands as he made the last desperate surge forward and then halted, tottering on knees that wanted to fold up under him.

He knew then that the cheers were not for him. They belonged to Livingston. But he did not know—

SOME one put an arm round him and thrust a lemon into his parched mouth. He pushed away the hand that held the lemon.

"Who—was—second?"

"You!"

Melville gave a cracked laugh.

Duffy took hold of him. Melville pointed to a box.

"Help me—over there."

"What for?"

"Help me!" Melville attempted to stagger off alone. Duffy guided him.

From the box a flat package was handed to Melville. He chuckled.

"Grab Cromley!" he commanded Duffy. "I want to get him—out here—where everybody—can see."

Rueful as he was over having lost the event, Duffy laughed.

"I get you! Hey, Cromley!"

In the act of leaving the track, Cromley halted, turned. He scowled as Duffy and Melville approached.

Before him, under the curious eyes of thousands, Melville whipped the paper from the package.

"For you, Crowley," he grinned. "The leather medal!"

Free Lances in Diplomacy

"A Major Operation in Politics" describes an exciting exploit wherein Mr. Trevor achieves something for his native America.

By Clarence Herbert New

A KHAKI-COLORED car was parked by the curb near the porte-cochère of the Elysée Palace Hotel—a car which by reason of its color and slightly worn paint was about as little conspicuous as a motor-vehicle could be; yet to anyone with a knowledge of motors, it gave an impression of power, speed and endurance in every line. Presently three men strolled down the Champs Elysées and stood chatting by it a few moments before getting in. While they did so, a handsomely dressed woman accompanied by two men drove up in a landaulet and got out at the porte-cochère. From instructions to their chauffeur as they stood under the electric-lights for a moment, it was evidently a supper-party rather than returning guests of the hotel. The attention of the men by the khaki car had been only casually attracted at first; then they stopped talking in order to observe the woman more closely—catch what she was saying to her companions. After that they got into the car, but instead of proceeding to the club for a game at bridge, the chauffeur was ordered to run them around the Bois for half an hour.

The owner of the car appeared to be an American of large business affairs. He was dressed in the sort of taste which makes one inconspicuous but costs a good bit of money. In this respect the other two were like him—wearing their clothes with unconscious ease. All three had about them a subtle air of command—the sort of quiet but assured bearing which impels lesser men to carry out their suggestions without argument or objection.

WHEN the car was sufficiently in motion to prevent what was said from being overheard by anyone they passed, the taller man remarked:

"The woman's face was familiar, George, but I never met her—as far as I'm concerned, it's merely a case of her being featured in the illustrated periodicals more or less, and my recognizing her from the half-tones. Can't recall her name, at that! What was it about the woman which seemed worth discussing—postponing our game to consider?"

"I don't just know myself, Lammy! But I've the hunch—which has come upon me so many times before—that she's mixed

up in something political which might quite easily be more far-reaching in its effect than merely feminist dabbling in state affairs. The old game of diplomatic intrigue as we knew it, in the days of monarchies—when each Government had its professional diplomatic corps—has been succeeded by something far more scattered and chaotic in its action, but directed by central juntas which exert their influence through the masses in a way that is far more dangerous to the peace of the world and much more difficult to combat. You find its infection, often, among the very classes whose education and business experience should make them see, through any sort of camouflage, the insane folly of extreme radicalism. I've seen that woman before—just where, I don't remember, but I'm quite sure it was in surroundings which didn't imply sufficient income for her to live in Paris even a few months in any such style as her appearance would indicate. . . . . I say— Look at Carter, will you! He has a sort of cat-and-canary expression. Bet he knows who she is! —Eh, Raymond? Loosen up and tell a man—that's a good chap!"

"Hmph! I don't wonder you couldn't place her, Trevor! Didn't know that you'd ever explored Greenwich Village to any extent—but that's the most likely place you would have met her. That's Sally Burden—whose father, Sam Burden, started his legal practice as a Tombs shyster. Went into ward politics. He came of a pretty decent old family, but the one thing on his mind after graduating from law-school was the acquiring and wielding of power. As a struggling young lawyer following respectable precedent, he didn't see much ahead but the slow upward grind for years; so he goes down into the muck of the legal arena and competes with any sort of vermin until some little ward influence begins coming to him. After that, it would be difficult to say what he did or didn't do. He stayed inside the law —but rubbed the outer line a little thin at times, I guess. Twenty years ago I had an inkling that he was one of the most influential political bosses in New York State. Ten years ago, I'm morally certain that he dictated the nomination of eleven Congressmen in seven different States—and managed, somehow, to have nine of them elected! The other two he only lost by disputed majorities.

"Well, his three daughters met hundreds of people in New York and Washington society—even though Sam never held office. They also naturally met a lot of men and some women who were most emphatically *not* in society, but who were mighty influential in their own strata of life, at that. Belle and Mary seemed to escape the political virus altogether—married successful business men and stand high, socially, today. Sally got the artist-bug—bobbed her hair, left the East Sixty-eighth Street house and went down to live in 'the Village.' She had quite a lot of artistic ability, but abused it by taking up crazy cults—though she did exhibit a few good canvases from time to time. Of course she got in with that Russian bunch down there—then began to mix with the Bronx and East Side foreigners.

"I never heard that she was mixing in politics at all, but she must have been doing it right along, because there was indication after Sam died that she had been working with him in that line. He certainly thought she was the whole works and lost all interest in the other two girls. Left nearly three millions to Sally in his will, and only ten thousand to each of the other girls—said their husbands had plenty of money and didn't need it, which was more or less true. They thought of breaking the will, but there was nothing doing! Sam knew the law inside-out, and drew that will himself. He died three years ago. Sally disappeared—after getting her money in shape where she could use it by cable from any part of the world. I heard of her indirectly in St. Louis, San Francisco, Chicago, Berlin, Budapest, Madrid.

"Just why I've made a point of tracing Sally's movements, I'm not dead sure myself—but every little while I get to thinking of the wide influence that girl probably has in certain strata of the underworld, and I keep uneasily watching the sort of company I hear of her keeping in different places. She's anything but a fool! Has one of the best educations and capacity for using her head of any woman I ever saw. But ability like that, if it happens to get the wrong slant, can be about as dangerous to the community at large as so much dynamite! Now—you saw those two men with her?"

"ONE of them," replied Trevor, "looked vaguely familiar, but the other seemed a more commonplace type—the sort who might be anybody, negligible."

"I'd have said that about him myself, if he'd stayed in Cincinnati where he belongs! Seeing him over here in company with Sally, I'm not so sure. His father was a leather-goods manufacturer—rated about half a million, the last I heard. He sent Percy to Harvard, where the boy just managed to skin through his examinations. Didn't amount to anything in athletics, either. Bummed around in Boston with a gang of speedy boys in his dormitory—had some reputation as a dancer and poker-player. Came out of Harvard an extreme radical in his ideas. Old man naturally expected to take him into the business, but the boy said he was an oppressor of labor, and got to traveling around with some of the labor-organizers.

"Old man finally suggested that he start in and learn the business as one of the factory employees. Old Bumstead had a pretty strong impression that he was treating his men with absolute fairness—supposed Percy would discover that if he started in as a factory-hand. Broadly speaking, there are two main divisions of the human race—workers and natural born loafers, who expect the workers to support them without work. Percy was on the loafer side and began making trouble right from the start. Never having done a day's work, of course he got pretty tired and irritable the first day or two. The other factory-hands guyed him at first—then began listening to some of his theories against work. Bumstead had to can him within a couple of weeks and tell him to hunt a job somewhere else—cutting off most of his allowance at the same time.

"I don't know what Percy's been doing for the last two or three years, but he seems now to be traveling around over here with Sally Burden as if he'd got hold of money somewhere, and I rather imagine that they have a good many of the same ideas on life in general—though Sally is anything but a loafer, herself. As for the other man we saw with her, I guess Lord Lammerford can probably tell us something about him if he thinks back a little—tries to recall men he's met in various parts of Russia? I know nothing about the man beyond an impression that I've seen him with other Russians somewhere here in Paris."

"How about him, Lammy? Did you get a close enough look to place him? Three or four years ago, you were a walking 'Who's Who' concerning practically every well-known person in Europe—but the war has brought so many former non-entities to the surface that it's a bit confusing, today—"

"Wait a bit! I've the feeling that I should know something about that chap, d'ye see—and yet, dashed if I can place him."

"Would he be some one you'd seen in the days of the Empire—or during that trip you made through from Siberia after the revolution?"

"MORE likely to have been during that last trip! H-m-m—wonder if it could have been in some other place than Russia? Ah! Fancy I've placed him now! Unless I'm mistaken in a resemblance,—and I'm considered good at remembering faces,—he'll be a studious, organizin' sort of chap who was actin' as secretary to one of the councils in Berlin awhile back. Quite a linguist! I saw letters on his desk from various parts of the United States and from India, Australia, France, Spain—all over the place. Seemed to be unusually up to date in his methods—had a system of card-indexin' which he claimed was his own—simple, but dev'lish good, I'd say. Called himself 'Voudowski' in Berlin. Of course, you know, I was supposed to be one of them, myself—from a British council in Manchester. From what I saw of the chap at the time, he appeared to be correspondin' all over the world for his Berlin council on a system of propaganda for their extreme ideas—but I formed an opinion, then, that the Berlin council itself was merely subsidiary to a headquarters at Moscow.

"Come to think of it, I've run across that chap here in Paris several times during the past year—saw him coming out of a house in one of the little streets not far from the Luxembourg as if he owned or leased it. At all events, he locked the front door and put the key in his pocket! Now, that was just an incident which impressed itself on my mind at the time without my recognizing the chap as Voudowski at all—but having placed the resemblance, I'm quite positive as to him and the chap who came out of the house being identical with this fellow we saw in Miss Burden's company. . . . . Well—where does that get us? Shall we drive on down to the club an' our game—or is there anything in this which might be more interestin'?"

"H'm! I'm a bit intrigued over the lady and her friends, myself! Eh—Carter?"

"Why—it looks to me as if all three of them scarcely could be together over here, considering what we know about them, unless they were actively interested in pushing radical propaganda at home—and that's bad medicine for every peaceable, law-abiding American in the States! The majority of us don't believe we've anything to gain save bloody chaos from a revolution aimed at overturning our laws and system of government. But frankly, as long as we've no law that will punish a person with at least imprisonment for that sort of activity, I don't see that there's much of anything we could do if we had the inclination to butt into this affair."

"If we undertook the job of smothering radical propaganda in every part of the United States and Canada—no! That's too large an order for any three men, no matter what their power or resources. But let's suppose a case? Suppose that the tentacles of an octopus reach out from a central body in Moscow—which isn't so very far from the truth, I imagine? Suppose the activities in each particular country are chiefly directed through an executive council which is subordinate to the central body and located in some European city where that country's authorities can't interfere with it? Suppose this political boss' daughter, by reason of her wide acquaintance in the underworld, her wealth and her superior intelligence, has shown a capacity for organization which attracted the attention of other organizers in Moscow or Berlin, until they've turned over to her a good part of the work in America —or to her and such a man as this Voudowski working together, with Paris as their base, for the reason that any American may and does come to Paris without arousing comment? If these suppositions have any basis of fact, and we three had the luck to put a good big crimp in their activities—eh? Might be worth giving ourselves a little trouble to attempt, I think!"

"YOU'RE dead right as to that, George! But even stoppin' the work of these two, as you suggest, may prove a fairly big order, backed as they are by the central organization. And all this theorizin' of ours may be pure moonshine, you know! We've not the slightest proof at present that Miss Burden an' those two chaps haven't drifted together over in the Latin Quarter, in the artists' colony, as so many of all nationalities do, whether all of 'em are actually artists or just people who like the artistic atmosphere."

"Circumstantial evidence, Lammy, is accepted by many courts as the most unshakable of all—because it is based upon the law of probability and correlation of events. For Sally Burden to be over here in the Latin Quarter, either painting or living on her money among other artists, is entirely plausible—and even probable. For Percy Bumstead to be in Paris while his father is still running his business, actively, implies one of several things: The old man may have given him up in disgust, thought he was less of a disgrace abroad than at home and sent him over here on an allowance. But that is just about the last thing that type of man would do—he'd far more likely cut off every cent of allowance to make the boy get his nose down on the grindstone for a while, particularly if his mother is not living. And neither course would account for his being with Sally Burden or imply that he'd made a lucky gamble somewhere and come over here to blow it in. Then we have Voudowski, who according to Lammy has no affiliations whatever with the artists. It would be natural enough for him to find Sally congenial on account of her Greenwich Village associations and political bent, but if she were over here merely as a rich girl spending a few months among artist friends in the Quartier, they wouldn't have come together at all. Very well! Now consider whether or no there is one common interest with all three which might bring them together? You have that in their political ideas—and in those alone. In no other way is it within the bounds of probability that they would be dining together in Paris, seemingly upon terms of close acquaintance."

"Hmph! That seems to make out a pretty good case! I fancy you've proved that this particular three are not exactly healthy for constitutional government either in France or the United States. And that would appear to be reason enough for our meddling if we are so inclined. Very good! How would you go about it?"

"That calls for careful thinking! That crowd, you know, aren't exactly children when it comes to looking out for themselves, Voudowski would probably remember you as a radical in Berlin, wouldn't he, Lammy, if you made up in the same character? Eh? Then it's safe enough for you

to go to him direct and renew the acquaintance—on the ground that you're going to America and want him to put you in touch with the organization over there. That is almost certain to bring about an introduction to Sally Burden and young Bumstead. You could, of course, introduce both Carter and me as members of your council going across with you, but I think it better to do some cabling in cipher to editors of certain newspapers in our syndicate and get a lot of biographical data concerning ward-politicians in—say, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Boston. Then we could introduce ourselves to Miss Burden as coming from two of those places—having made up our minds to run at the next elections, and wanting the support of her organization over there—assuming, of course, we've been given to understand that she may help us if she will. You can back us up with a recommendation from your British council which has had certain underground business dealings with us. Of course we'll want to go over this a bit more carefully before trying it, but I think something along those lines ought to get us pretty thick with Voudowski's and Sally's gang in Paris. How does it strike you?"

"Ought to work. If Raymond feels like taking some personal risk for the sake of what political advantage there may be in it for his country, you'd best take him in hand and make a few trifling changes in his map. As he is, now, he's rather too well known about Paris. H-m-m—it's barely possible that Miss Burden is occupyin' rooms at some hotel and maintainin' a studio sort of place on the side for conferences of the Russian crowd. Wonder if we couldn't get back to the Elysée Palace in time to shadow their car an' see where it takes 'em? Eh?"

TREVOR leaned forward and spoke to his Afghan chauffeur in Urdu—after which the car swerved about at the next turn in the Bois and raced back to the Champs Elysées at double the speed used in coming out. The man, Achmet—one of a numerous family, many of whom had come to England in the service of the Trevors—was an adept at shadowing other vehicles with a high-powered car. Parking near the hotel while Lord Lammerford strolled through the lower floor to ascertain whether the party of three were still in the supper-room, he waited until their landaulet drove away from the porte-cochère before starting his motor, then followed at a leisurely pace more than a block in the rear—down the Rue Galilee to the Avenue Kleber and then two blocks to the Rue St. Didier. At each corner Achmet stopped his car with its hood barely projecting beyond the building-line of the cross-street, in such a position that he could see any vehicle on it for several blocks, though a chauffeur looking back would be unable to see him at all. Then, when the car ahead turned another corner, he raced to the spot where it had disappeared and followed the same tactics again. The khaki-color of his vehicle, of course, made it less conspicuous by day or night.

To the surprise of Trevor and his companions, the landaulet stopped before a small but quite respectable house in the Rue St. Didier, miles away from the Quartier Latin, and Sally Burden let herself in with a key, leaving no question as to her living there in a sufficiently conventional part of Paris' West End, though not a fashionable one. Of course she was in position to receive any sort of person there in the evening without attracting comment, as long as they came and went quietly. The street is a short byway between two boulevards, and it is essentially *bourgeois* rather than radical—far removed from the orgies and mad pranks of the Quartier, having no reputation at the Préfecture of harboring dangerous individuals of any breed. In fact, both Lammerford and Raymond Carter (at one time Chargé d'Affaires in the American Embassy) were inclined to think Trevor's theory in regard to the party probably a mistaken one—until they followed the landaulet farther, across the Seine and down to a house in the Rue Vaneau whose rear windows overlooked the gardens of what formerly had been the Austrian Embassy.

It was not the house in which Trevor had had certain exciting adventures during the war,—obtaining access through an underground tunnel which connected it with the Embassy itself,—but within a few doors of it, and quite possibly with its own underground means of exit in case of a raid by the police. Both Trevor and Lammerford—who had recently obtained his Earldom for services to his Government—knew that practically the entire square was more or less honeycombed with secret passages and sewers underground which had been used by agents of the Charlottenburg Junta during the war, even after the

Austrian Embassy had been taken over by the French Government, and were now speculating as to some possible connection between that Junta and the more radical organization in Moscow. The house itself was identified by Lammerford as the one from which he had seen Voudowski come out with such an air of proprietorship.

Percy Bumstead got out and talked with the Russian on the narrow sidewalk a few moments, in low tones, but evidently was not asked to go in. It may have been that their acquaintance was still too recent for entire confidence—but Trevor was inclined to think it more likely to be lack of nerve on the young fellow's part. He must know Voudowski by this time for the sort of person who not only preached extreme measures but was entirely willing to give a demonstration even if there were nothing to be gained but an object lesson—but Percy would still have left in him some of the American distaste for that sort of thing, and a disinclination to be mixed up in it. Getting into the landaulet again, he was taken to a small hotel, little frequented by Americans, in the Rue de Rivoli.

LAMMERFORD'S renewal of the former brief acquaintance with Voudowski proved ridiculously easy. The Russian had cultivated an excellent memory for faces as one of the essentials in the work he was carrying on. Aside from this, he recalled the supposed "Grinnell's" former interest in his filing systems, back there in Berlin, and the fact that he had been vouched for by certain English radicals as a man with nerve and initiative to carry out any dangerous undertaking if he saw enough to be gained by it. So when the pseudo Grinnell turned up in Paris, stating that he was going over to the United States with the idea of working into local politics, where he understood there was material for extensive organization, Voudowski assured him that their coming together was a most fortunate chance, inasmuch as he could put him in touch with an American woman who had done something almost colossal in that line and now practically directed all of the various activities in the United States—a woman whom he assuredly would be delighted to meet.

"You will readily understand, *mon ami*, how greatly we needed some one of her type in America. We have Russian women over there by the score—singers, actresses, painters, and even married to prominent business men—oh, yes! They have considerable vogue; they spread 'parlor bolshevism' among various circles in American society, as a fad. They talk certain editors and journalists into more or less belief that there may be something progressive in our theories. But their influence is always limited, because they are obviously foreigners who fail to catch the imagination of the American people. This Ma'amselle Burden, *au contraire,* is of old American stock. She inherited so much money that nobody thinks of her either as an adventuress or having anything to do with the underworld. She lived in their New York artists' *quartier,* it is true—she has real ability in that line; but her social position always has been good nevertheless. Her sisters are wealthy and prominent *bourgeoises.* But her father, during his lifetime, was one of the most influential political leaders in the country, and the girl was closely associated with him. Well—you observe! Precisely the sort of person who by caste and breeding and education is supposed to loathe everything radical, with property enough to have a strong interest in seeing it safeguarded by a constitutional government which permits the accumulation of wealth—and who is one of a class which believes that only the wealthy and best educated should have any real governing power. *Hein!* It is to laugh—were it not so greatly to our advantage! In her rather handsome head we have perhaps the keenest brains, the best organizing ability, the most pronounced disgust for all constitutional government, in our entire organization. Oh, you will like this Mees Burden, comrade! She will know exactly where to give you a start over there!"

TREVOR and his old friend Raymond Carter, approached the problem of ingratiating themselves with Sally Burden and her associates from a different angle altogether. First injecting a few drops of an East Indian drug under certain portions of their facial skin to produce a little swelling that would last for a week or more and entirely alter the expression of their faces, they secured invitations to certain affairs at which they found she was likely to be among the guests—and easily managed to be introduced as fellow Americans staying a few weeks in Paris. But for several days

they made no reference whatever to radical activities. Then they ran across Lammerford as the supposed Grinnell, apparently quite by accident, and were pounced upon as Americans whom he had recently shown through the East End of London after learning that they were pretty radical in their political views.

Miss Burden, considerably to her surprise, saw them hobnobbing in a corner with Voudowski and Grinnell—(whom she had readily accepted as being what the Russian supposed him). Approaching near enough to catch scraps of the conversation, she learned for the first time that both of her countrymen knew a number of the Russians in the United States and had attended several of their meetings. Trevor, as a Mr. Charles Thompson of Boston—and Carter, as Frederick Smith of Pittsburgh—were impersonating middle-class business men who had never been successful enough to consider themselves in the capitalist ranks and fancied that the "big interests" were all the time squeezing them down where it was impossible to get ahead very far. Like many men of that sort, they were members of benevolent associations and trade organizations which they considered an advantage to them in business—that is, they were typical of the small dealer who flocks with his kind and rails at "big business" instead of spending the same amount of time in study upon the problem of making his own business bigger. In deciding upon the most advisable characters to assume, they had picked out individuals formerly well known in the cities of their birth who had gone West and finally disappeared from all knowledge of their fellow-townsmen—local inhabitants who might return at any time with more or less of a fortune made elsewhere and settle down again among old friends and neighbors. They had each done a good deal of confidential cabling until they got the names safest to use, and corroborative data to identify them.

UPON the previous occasions when they had met, Sally Burden was quite strongly attracted to the supposed Charles Thompson of Boston. She knew a number of Boston people—whom, of course, Trevor had grown up *with* and kept track of during the years of his career in England. She knew enough of the stiff-necked viewpoint of the "Hub" to understand perfectly why a young fellow whose tastes were commercial rather than "highbrow" would consider his opportunities better in the West than in the city where he was brought up—and the satisfaction it would be to such a man, some years later, to come back with a modest fortune, settle down in his home town and perhaps go into politics as a pastime. But what seemed to her at first a discrepancy was the charming manner and really good education this Thompson had. Capacity for study might be, she decided, inherent in all Bostonians, and the charm something acquired through his experiences in the West. Of course she never dreamed that, exceptionally keen-witted as she was, she must prove but putty in the hands of a man who had been for many years a world-celebrity, wielding a great deal of influence through sheer force of mind and experience. Presently, drawing him aside from Voudowski and the other two, she intimated that he might have been a little more frank with her from the start.

"Why didn't you give me a hint, Mr. Thompson, that you were in sympathy with our cause even if not actually one of us?"

"Hmph! How was I to suppose that an American society girl with a barrel of money would have anything radical in her make-up! The two propositions simply don't match! I'm not actively interested in the radical campaign—yet, so you can't do me any great harm with your knowledge of certain political sympathies which I may have—if your radicalism is merely a bluff to let you get at some of their plans and block them. Honestly, you seem so unmistakably in the wrong boat that I can't quite swallow your actually going in for this sort of thing in earnest unless, as I say, you're in the enemy's camp for constitutional government reasons! A girl with your wealth and social position! What have you to gain by it?"

"How about a great benefit to the mass of humanity—poor struggling human beings who have been ground down and oppressed by the iron heel of moneyed interests for ages? Isn't that enough to enlist the sympathies and coöperation of any girl with a mind and soul? Oh, come! There's no sense in argument upon this question between you and me! Evidently we've both felt the same urge. The only difference between us is that I've been able to accomplish quite a lot already, while you are considering whether you really be-

lieve in our cause sufficiently to pitch in and work for it. You really do, and you're just about ready to jump—but you're beginning to realize that it's grim, relentless war instead of some fad which you may take up and drop when you please! If you join us, Mr. Thompson—that settles it! We'll see that you don't go back! Now—tell me, you had some idea in mind about returning to live in Boston and going into local politics there, hadn't you? Mr. Smith has much the same idea in regard to Pittsburgh?"

"Why—something along those lines, I think—only we'd want something better than local politics."

"What makes you think you'd get anywhere in such a game?"

"Well, both of us were formerly members of various lodges and trade organizations—many of the old crowd are still in our home towns. We've picked up ideas in knocking about the world which can be worked out for their benefit, and it wont be difficult to make 'em see that. They're mostly a cautious lot—don't meddle in politics beyond voting right at elections—men in a limited business way, who have never had the opportunity to expand which they ought to have if business were not controlled by the trusts. Now, if they can elect the right sort of representation, politically, they could get somewhere—and it'll be pretty darned easy to make 'em see it!"

"Fine! But their backing wouldn't help you much if the 'machine' didn't know or trust you!"

"Oh, sure! I used to be pals with Tom Galloway, years ago. He wanted to run me for lieutenant governor just before I went West. Tom's been dead, now, for six or eight years—but his right-hand man, Corrigan, is practically the boss these days. Bill Corrigan used to know me as a friend of Tom's, and a pretty liberal contributor to the campaign-funds, considering that I wasn't rich at the time. Then, there were Matty Burns and Heinie Schwartz and Tony Lopreto—all of 'em in ward politics, most of them alive and still in the game, last I heard. They'll all remember my name, even if I've put on weight and changed some in appearance—some of 'em members of the old lodge yet. I guess I wouldn't have much trouble getting solid."

"Wouldn't it be better to run for some office out West where you've been located the last few years?"

"Sure! If I were running on the opposition ticket! On any such platform as you've got, I couldn't win in that particular neighborhood in fifty years!"

"Our nominees haven't any platfrom, my friend—we know better than that! We run them on one or another of the regular party platforms, but with a secret pledge that they'll support any of our measures which may be introduced in Congress or the legislatures. Perhaps you're right in going back to Boston; you seem to know the bosses pretty well there, and you'll have a much larger foreign element to back you."

THE supposed Thompson had been casting occasional glances at a woman who seemed to be very popular, with whom Sally Burden had been speaking a few minutes before. Now he asked:

"By the way, Miss Burden—do you mind humoring my curiosity? Who is the handsome woman you were chatting with just before you came across the room to us?"

"I don't wonder you're interested—because she really *is* charming. Quite a celebrity, you know! The Mrs. Trevor who was formerly an English countess—known all over the world. She and her husband gave up their titles because he was born in America—fellow-townsman of yours, as it happens—and felt that they were in a false position as British peers. I understand they're not so much in the public eye just now, leading a more retired life—but if anything, they're even more popular. Why—of course! You must know all about Mr. Trevor's famous 'submarine challenge'! You certainly read the accounts in the papers about his appointing a rendezvous in mid-ocean and sinking three of the U-boats with airplanes and a queerly designed craft of his own?"

"Oh-h-h—that Trevor, eh? And the lady is his wife—who had the nerve to accompany him through that little duel! By Jove! You must be rather proud of her friendship!"

"I certainly would be if we had progressed as far as that! I only met her a few days ago, but she appears to rather like me for some reason or other. Invited me to spend a night or two next week at that lovely home of hers on the Avenue de Neuilly—to meet her husband and some of their equally famous friends. For people who now consider themselves merely every-

day commoners, their evenings 'at home' come about as near being what used to be called a salon as anything of the sort ever seen in Paris, I think."

"You'll accept the invitation, I suppose?"

"Rather! They're not extended to everyone, I can assure you! Possibly I may be able to bring up your name in such a way as to get one for you also."

DURING the next few days both Thompson and Smith called at Sally Burden's house—meeting, there, two other Americans who seemed to have come over at her suggestion to discuss politics in the States. Apparently she knew them about as well as she did Percy Bumstead—which was considerably better, as far as their previous history and occupations were concerned, than *they* knew *her*. But they had been given to understand that if they wanted to get the backing of a certain group in politics, there was nothing doing until they had reached some basis of agreement with Miss Burden.

By means of guarded inquiries through channels which they had used before, Trevor and his friends learned that she never went to Voudowski's house unless accompanied by one or two art-students from the Quartier, as if visiting the studio of a fellow-artist. (Both were of the opinion that these art-students and probably several of their intimates were at other times secret agents of the radical organization.) Aside from these visits, a close espionage was rewarded by catching her, twice, in the act of passing small packets of memoranda to Voudowski under cover of her handkerchief or fan, at houses where both were guests for the evening. Inferentially, she was obtaining, with more or less regularity, mail and cable messages from home which conveyed quite a mass of statistical information subsequently handed over to Voudowski for tabulation and filing in such a way that it would be instantly available for reference. And the occasions upon which she visited his house with the art-students were presumably for conferences in which these memoranda were used. If these theories were correct, the three decided that the sooner they could induce her to bring them into such a conference, the more chance there would be of their having some definite basis to work upon.

It was becoming increasingly evident to them that the girl and her associates were exceedingly dangerous factors in American affairs. Nan Trevor had insisted upon taking a hand in the proceedings the moment they described what had come under their observation and what they suspected concerning the girl. Though making the acquaintance of Sally Burden had been Nan's suggestion, they saw very shortly where such an acquaintance might be useful—having the girl in the Trevor mansion a couple of nights would give them certain opportunities which they might not otherwise obtain, provided she let them accompany her to Voudowski's before that.

Lammerford, as the supposed Grinnell, was already provided for—the Russian had suggested his occupying one of the bedrooms on the second floor until he sailed for New York, and had given him a latchkey. But getting the others into one of the supposed conferences required some thinking, if it were to be accomplished quickly. All things considered, Trevor decided upon rushing the girl as if he were beginning to be infatuated—flowers, a matinée, dinners, the opera, all upon the ground that he and the pseudo Fred Smith enjoyed her society—wanted to give her a good time. Spurred by the necessity, Raymond Carter proved himself a more cultivated and attractive man than she had first supposed. He hadn't quite the power to make her lose her head completely, as she did with Trevor upon two occasions—but he was altogether too good company to leave out of their daily plans. The result was that she asked them to accompany her when she visited the little house in the Rue Vaneau, Saturday night. She said that Voudowski would be discussing American affairs that evening with Percy Bumstead, John Robinson and Joe Di Salvo, and suggestions from Thompson and Fred Smith might be of value. As for herself, she admitted to them that she had a good deal of inside information which they would find necessary before they got anywhere.

ROBINSON and Joe Di Salvo they had previously met at Miss Burden's house in the Rue St. Didier, as before stated, and they found upon reaching Voudowski's that the conference included only the six in addition to himself and Miss Burden—it being apparently the custom of the organization to deal with activities in each country separately, in order that one set

of secret agents might have no detailed knowledge as to who the others were or just what they might be doing at the time.

Voudowski occupied the front alcove chamber on the second floor as his sleeping- and living-room. The pseudo Grinnell had been given temporarily the spare bedroom in the rear of it. Below, on the parlor floor, were a small reception-room in front and larger dining-room in the rear, with kitchen and coal-cellar in the basement. The stairs to the upper floor were built inside of a solid partition, with a heavy door, usually locked, at their foot—so that unless one descended from the roof—a steeply pitched one—or picked the lock of this door, there was no chance for him to explore the top of the house even if alone in it a few moments. Grinnell, of course, had explored it—but without time enough to go through the mass of filed data to form an idea of what it contained.

UPON this Saturday evening, however, Voudowski took them up to the front room over his own—where wine and cakes, coffee and tobacco in various forms were upon a table by the fireplace. There were a divan, a long oak table with two reading-lamps, and comfortable lounging-chairs. But the most conspicuous features of the room were the rows of built-in filing and card-index cases which covered each of the walls to the height of one's head. Above them were shelves full of books, to the ceiling. Grinnell remarked, as he came in, that he recognized the general filing system, but that Voudowski appeared to have improved upon his original idea—and asked him to explain the whole thing for them.

This hit the Russian in his vulnerable spot—tempted him to give them details which, with more time for consideration, he would have thought an unnecessary risk. But with at least three of his guests more or less experts in that sort of arrangement for masses of statistical data, he was as helpless as an entomologist among fellow bug-specialists. He showed them sections devoted to each particular country, to the subdivisions of that country, to the classifications in each subdivision. The collection he had gotten together on that floor was the gradual accumulation of fifteen years—the house having been in his possession all through the war. The portion which Lammerford had seen in the German capital was merely a local section of the main collection, added to it as soon as the stuff could be safely gotten into Paris. The American section was presumably the accumulations of Sally Burden and her father, put into shape by the Russian from barrels of unindexed memoranda which she had sent over from the States. The result had been instantly available data of immense value in any sort of political campaign over there.

VOUDOWSKI was evidently an executive of the organization; but when it came to directing activities in America, Sally Burden seemed to have far more grasp of the situation in various localities and simply took charge of that end when she thought it advisable without asking permission from anybody. The fact that she so thoroughly knew what she was about prevented any real interference with her, though the Russian occasionally conveyed a veiled hint that she was overstepping her authority. At the conference she had arranged for this Saturday evening, she started in as soon as they were all making themselves comfortable in the filing-room by getting down to business without loss of time or words.

"Let's go over Percy's case first—and get his affair under way. He doesn't see how he can possibly get a Congressional nomination because he's not known as a politician in the district—but I've never had any idea of running him over on the Covington side. Now, the First Ohio District takes in the whole East End of Cincinnati, with its suburbs—the 'beer district,' you might call it. The regular machine nominee is going to run on a wet platform, no matter who he is—and the machine is looking round for all the additional strength it can get, particularly among the labor-socialists. Up in the Twenty-first District they've got a pretty good chance of skinning through at the next election with Heinemann, another wet, if they can get just a little extra support. Well, the machine will trade with us—support anyone we name whose record isn't too smelly in the First District if we'll throw our whole strength for their man up in Cleveland. The solid business-standing of Percy's father makes him very acceptable to the bosses—and we win both ways, because Heinemann is really one of us, pledged to support any bill we succeed in getting introduced. I consider Percy just about the same as elected right now—we

needn't bother any more about him. Now, if Charley Thompson and Fred Smith can be induced to join us, I'm pretty nearly as sure of electing them. But I want a show-down before we leave this room. They'll have to join us, pledging support to all our bills, no matter what—and once they consent, there'll be no backing out, because the risk would be too great for all of us! How about it, Charley?"

"Oh—I guess I'm game, if Fred is! I'll say, flatly, right now, that I wont support anything like what your crowd means by 'direct action!' I'm too thoroughly American for anything of that sort. But I'll agree to support any old legislation you try to put through in the regular way, whether it overturns the present system of government or not. First, however, you've got to show me that Fred and I really stand a chance of election if we run."

"H-m-m—I think you ought to go all the way with us, but perhaps you could really help more by saying a lot about those reservations of yours—gives you a sort of moderate, conservative tone. Stefan, suppose we ran Thompson in the Tenth Massachusetts District? How much support have we there?"

Voudowski pulled out a drawer of his filing cabinet which held part of the Massachusetts data and glanced rapidly over several of the cards.

"Has he a residence there?"

"Not yet. Considering where he wants to locate."

"Not a fashionable section; he'd have to live somewhere over in Charlestown—that is, it would give him more of a pull, locally. H-m-m—they're thinking of running Foley next time, but he's not popular with the machine. He's too headstrong; they don't like some of his ideas. If Thompson could renew some of his old acquaintances among the politicians, I think he'd get the full backing of the bosses—they're just about ripe for a dark-horse candidate. But they'll make us pay for it—probably ask our full support for their regular man up in the Essex County Districts—the Sixth and Seventh."

"I was going to suggest running Charley in one of the 'shoe districts'—but he'll stand a better chance in Boston itself, more of our crowd congregated there. All right—Thompson for the Tenth Massachusetts. Now, how about Fred Smith for the Thirtieth Pennsylvania?"

Again, Voudowski consulted his cards.

"Not a chance! Ah!, I see! You knew that perfectly well, ma'amselle! You just like to test Voudowski—*oui!* It was the Thirty-*second* District you had in mind, was it not—where we have much influence in West Homestead and that neighborhood? Eh? Well—the conditions are much the same as in Boston. They will run Baumann if they get nobody they think has a better chance—but they do not altogether trust Baumann, though he would go strong on a wet platform. *Oui!* Fred Smeeth could be elected from that District, I think—if we support the machine man with our full strength in the Thirtieth and Thirty-first—bring down the other side's majority in Pittsburgh enough to make them sit up and think a bit!"

THE discussion was continued until midnight, when Miss Burden was taken home by the supposed Thompson and his friend—who then called a taxi and were driven to within a block of the Trevor mansion on the Avenue de Neuilly, where they presently sat down in Nan Trevor's charming little study for a council of war.

"There's no use kidding ourselves, Raymond, that the outfit those fellows have got in the Rue Vaneau and the organization behind it can't be allowed to get very far in American politics! Working under the surface as they do, upon the minds of ignorant and prejudiced voters, it would be difficult to say what they can't do—in time! That is—if nobody exposes or puts a crimp in them. It's a joke if you like—the calm assurance with which they tell us here in Paris that they will elect such a man from a certain Congressional District when they get around to it! But I've an idea they'll come pretty near delivering the goods—in one of the off- opposition-years. And there's one point which we can't overlook: Every voter in the country is entitled to have his beliefs represented in Congress unless they are too anarchistic or revolutionary. If there's any appreciable section of the people who really believe what that gang preach, they are theoretically entitled to have representation in the law-making bodies—until, as I say, their beliefs are obviously productive of civil war—ruin, political chaos! That's where every sane, law-abiding citizen has the right and the duty of stopping them. Now they're playing practical politics in no more unlawful way—on the surface—than any of the bigger political parties. They

know exactly what trades and deals they can make with each of the machines over home—just where votes are for sale and where they are to be obtained by party interest. In this particular case, it seems to me that the remedy which will get us farthest is somehow to entirely destroy that collection of filed and tabulated data—if we can."

"No argument on that score, George—but I'd suggest going a bit farther than that—"

"Something in the way of 'framing' some of the gang in the eyes of the others—so they'll never quite trust each other again, Nan?"

"That's the idea, exactly!"

"Well—what's your plan?"

"The same one I had in mind when I started in to make Sally Burden's acquaintance. As far as the United States is concerned, she has the most dangerous brains of the lot. Queer her with the others so that she'll have to leave Paris at a moment's notice to save her life—keep in retirement for some time—and you hit that organization a pretty staggering blow!"

"I believe you've struck it, Nan! Think you could impersonate her well enough to pass with Voudowski if he didn't talk with you?"

"That's what I've been studying her to do. I've some excellent photographs, picked up at a studio in the Rue de Rivoli. We are much the same build and complexion. Best of all, I have a flagon of the perfume which was specially made up for her by Agnel in the Avenue de l'Opéra. I've studied her little unconscious motions, her most usual expressions—and have duplicated three of her costumes, so closely that no man at least would be able to detect any difference. In a partly subdued light, if I said but a few words in the lower range of her voice, I'll wager a hundred francs that I could absolutely deceive your friend Voudowski!"

"If you really can,—and I'm inclined to believe it,—that simplifies the whole proposition to a point where a schoolboy might almost attempt it—considering that Lammy has a room in the house, comes and goes when he pleases, with a latchkey. He's sure to know Voudowski's habits pretty well by this time!"

Of course, had Sally Burden or any of her associates suspected either of the trio to be anything but what they appeared, if they had connected them in any way with the celebrated Mrs. Trevor, it would have been almost impossible to put through any such plan as they worked out. But in the absence of such suspicion, it was ridiculously easy.

It was Voudowski's habit during the evenings he spent at home—and frequently when he returned from some other house—to work at his filing and compiling, studying political conditions in this or that country, upon the upper floor. The supposed Grinnell was privileged to join him if he put in an appearance before the stair-door was locked, and did so upon two or three occasions. During the day, when he knew that Voudowski would be out for several hours, he fetched in half a dozen tins of kerosene oil and a rope ladder, which he concealed under a discarded bookcase in the rear room on the third floor. Then, upon the second evening of Sally Burden's visit in the Trevor mansion, he went up with the Russian to assist in some of his compilation work on English cities.

ABOUT ten o'clock, when Miss Burden was dancing with Mr. Trevor and some of the more intimate friends who were spending the evening—Madame Nan excused herself for an hour or so, explaining that the steward of their Devonshire estate had run over with some business matters needing her attention. Fifteen minutes later, with an entire change of dress and appearance, she left the house by a little side door, got into one of her cars and was raced across the Seine to the house in the Rue Vaneau, where she was joined by Trevor and Carter in immaculate evening clothes, but disguised with false beards. Slipping a domino over the upper part of her face, she followed them in as the door was softly opened with a duplicate key, and up to Grinnell's room on the second floor, where they found a window open and a rope ladder hanging down from the dormer above, at the rear of the house.

The first intimation Voudowski had of anything happening was when he looked up from his work to find both himself and Grinnell covered with automatics in the hands of two bearded gentlemen. Handcuffs were snapped about their wrists; gags shoved into their mouths—and the outrage proceeded to worse extremes. A handsome girl in a half-mask and veil—whose gown, movements, perfume and low re-

marks seemed unmistakable to them—emptied case after case of index-cards, memoranda, letters, cablegrams, and so forth, into piles along the floor while one of the men poured kerosene over them to insure their being completely destroyed. Finally a number of the piles in various parts of the room were set on fire—and the two prisoners led downstairs. Then, when the street was deserted, they were taken out to a landaulet at the curb, with automatics against their sides.

The car was stopped at the next corner until it could be seen that the entire top-floor of the house was a mass of flame. Running a few blocks farther, one of the bearded men got out to communicate with the fire department in order that adjoining houses might not be destroyed. After which, the car ran north to Montmartre, where the handcuffs were removed and the pair allowed to get out upon the sidewalk. Just as it was driving off, leaving them miles away from the burning building, Grinnell sprang forward and grabbed at an indistinct white object on the running-board. Under the next street-light, they examined it—a woman's handkerchief marked *"S. B."* in a monogram—exuding a faint perfume with which they had become familiar.

To Sally Burden and the rest of the party in the Trevor mansion, it seemed less than an hour before their hostess returned to them and ordered the supper served. Trevor and his friend, Mr. Carter, appeared about the same time. Had anyone stated that all three had been out of the house for two hours or more, across the city in the Quartier, it would have been ridiculed as impossible.

NEXT morning Sally Burden was awakened by the insistent ringing of a telephone by her bedside. The voice of a terrified maid in her Rue St. Didier house came almost whisperingly over the wire with most amazing statements. First—her two American friends, Messieurs Thompson and Smeeth, had called at six in the morning, very much excited, asking for the Ma'amselle Burden who, they said, was in great danger from M'sieur Voudowski—who said she had burned down his house and that he would certainly kill her before night. The Russian and M'sieur Grinnell were even then on their way to the Rue St. Didier. The Americans had asked where she might be found and were coming to see her at once. (Hiatus of silence for two minutes—then the maid again.) Voudowski had just been admitted, below, by the butler—was in the reception-room with one hand inside his waistcoat—saying he would wait there until Ma'amselle came home.

By the time she had slipped on a few clothes, Madame Trevor came to her door with the message that a Mr. Thompson and a Mr. Smith were in the drawing-room asking to see her at once upon a most urgent matter. When the two women descended, these gentlemen explained that they had been walking home in the early morning from a student ball in the Quartier and had gone a few blocks out of their way to see a fire. Found it was Voudowski's house—the Russian and Grinnell standing outside, looking at the smoking ruins—excitedly babbling to them a most incredible story of their being handcuffed while Miss Burden and two men fired the place—exhibited her handkerchief, which they had grabbed from the running-board of the car. The whole thing was utter rot, of course—but there was no question about Voudowski's determination to kill her. Her only safety lay, it seemed, in somehow getting across the Channel at once—and the two Americans were ready to accompany her as a guard.

After a moment's reflection, Nan Trevor suggested the best plan in the circumstances.

"We'll all run out to the flying field in a closed car—with a hot breakfast in a hamper. I've a couple of dependable 'planes, there, which will be ready when we reach the field. Then I'll take you across to our place in Devon—Trevor Hall. Nobody will dream you're there. You can remain until our yacht runs up to Salcombe Harbor for you. Mr. Trevor and I were thinking of cruising out to the Orient very shortly with our friends Earl Lammerford and Raymond Carter. Seems to me you'd be far safer with us than anywhere in America at present—eh? Really, my dear—there's no sense in your risking life and fortune as you seem to have been doing! Chuck it! Get back among less dangerous people!"

The girl shivered a little. Her nerve was gone. For the first time, she got a comprehensive glimpse of the sort of thing she had been working for.

The Weasel's Kit

A remarkable story of the Olympic Mountain wilderness, wherein a dog who has gone back to the wild interferes in a kidnaping plot.

By CHARLES ALEXANDER

AFTER a few delicious stretches and yawns, and a long drink at his favorite rivulet, Black Buck looked out over the sheltered lowland. He saw no creatures by whom he did not wish to be seen. He was fresh from sleep and eager for gossip—each hour the wilderness changes, and always it has one more trick in its kit, for the Unknown lies over every hill and in every dark gulch. Even in his own domain Buck felt, after sleep, like a wary newcomer.

The sun was westering. The magic hour of change was on. So crowded were their short lives that the crickets and fat locusts could wait no longer, but burst into activity and sound. The hum of their industry rose from a murmur to a roar. Yet it was not a roar to ring upon the ear. It spoke of teeming activity in the loamy earth and soft-fleshed firs and spruces. It meant, to Buck, that all within the lowland was quiet and serene.

He trotted and stopped.

In one thicket the song of the locusts had ceased. Elsewhere it went on. In another near-by thicket it stopped. In the first thicket it began again. Something was passing there. Buck slipped down to see.

Where the rivulet sauntered through dark copses he found the trail of the strangers. They were two. There were, first, the small, quick tracks of a man. No such tracks belonged in the Yachats. But what gave Buck pause was the set of tracks sometimes beside, sometimes behind the man's tracks. These tracks were small and close together. There was the heavy print of a heel, and a broader palm in front of it, palm and heel sometimes joined on the outside and sometimes not. Ahead of the palm was the print of a row of little toes; and in some deep tracks short little claws tipped the toes, while in shallower tracks no claw-prints showed.

Clearly the man-stranger was accompanied by a cub bear who walked only on his hind feet. Buck stopped and stared, for never had he seen such a thing as this, the trail of a man and a cub bear, one hard upon the heels of the other. And so far as his keen eyes might tell him, he had found the trail of a hostile man and a tender-footed cub bear.

He followed along from track to track. Nowhere had the bear put its forepaws to earth. Only the smaller hind feet showed. Very slowly Buck followed, and time and again put his nose into the tracks, only to jerk his head up again.

At one point, in a soggy sink, he found water trickling into the tracks. They were very fresh. Buck slipped into the heavy brush growth. Circling, he stopped at the end of the lowland.

The thickets ended here. A fern-brake ran on. Hazy daylight still clung over the fern; a few enormous snags, rotting monuments to a once-towering forest that fire had smitten, black and white where the sun still caught them, studded the fern like huge candelabra. The slopes of the lowland emptied into the fern; likewise all lowland trails joined and entered the fern as one. Ears cocked and eyes watching the edge of the forest, Buck waited.

IN the morning of that day a man, crammed into a niche in a lumber-pile, groaned for the thousandth time as the lumber shifted and pinched him. He was between two piles of beams on a swaying flat-car, and the rudely dove-tailing ends lurched now together and now apart. The man crawled out and sat on top of the load. He adjusted a heavy sack on his back, brushed off the toes of his shoes, and looked at the country.

The railroad threaded the dank cañon of the Siuslaw. Most of the way it overhung the angry river; the rest of the way it was out on it, crossing and recrossing as the river doubled and twisted among the coast mountains. The scene was forbidding and the train, fighting the grade and the curves, was crawling little faster than a walk. Looking down into the nook he had come from, the man shouted down into the cranny:

"Come out of it; this is our station."

A figure climbed up; the man sent it ahead, and both crawled down and stood on the end of the car, clutching the brake-wheel. The figure beside the small man was that of a boy. He was half as tall as the man; he was hatless, and sober-faced. His eyes were almost round, and not of the puffy almond-shape that is the penalty of maturity. He let go of the wheel with one hand and brushed his bright hair back from his eyes.

The man breathed hard. He reached for the boy's hand.

"We'll jump—that bunch of fern ahead."

The boy did not give his hand. He jerked it away, ran and hurled his chubby form toward the fern.

After him leaped the man; and as he scrambled up and brushed off his shoes, his glance darted around for the boy. The latter was running, and the man spurted after him—through the salal and salmonberry, and higher on the mountain, among the slowly swaying firs.

There he caught the little fellow. Close on the boy's heels, he whisked around a huge fir-trunk and met the boy creeping on the other side of it.

"Now, son," panted the weasel-man, "I don't wanta hurt you, but you're gonna stay with me. Get me?"

The little fellow's eyes clouded with shifting sullen depths, and they were dry, quite dry. He had lost one shoe on the mountain-side. No answer did he make the man, but he pulled off his other shoe and fiercely flung it among the trees.

The man started, and his eyes squinted into pencil-points. But he was quiet. He looked inquiringly at his surroundings—and threw up a hand, hesitatingly, as if to ward off a fancied blow. On every side mountains towered above him.

TAKING the boy's hand, he walked a few steps quickly, and as quickly stopped in his tracks. It mattered so little in what direction he went. Range beyond range surrounded him. All were without system or trend—rough-jumbled, broken and crowded together. Greater ranges were superimposed across the smaller. Narrow V-cañons, creeks tumbling along them, two-hundred-foot deadfall "doties" jamming them, separated mountain from mountain. Over all, rank on somber rank, swept the fir forest.

It was uninviting, but the weasel-man had no choice. He trotted down-mountain and into the thick of the timber. There had been that slip-up at Eugene. There had been the ambuscade at the cabin. Never again would he use a woman in his work.

But he had escaped, and he had carried off the boy, in spite of the law and the vengeful hounds of the law and the slip-up that might have done for him. One thing they had forgotten—the Coos Bay freight-train. That was the way of it, when things went wrong—there was always another

chance if a man could only see it. And he was the Weasel, and in his kit he always had one more trick.

He went a little gingerly in the twilight region of the cañon. The silence was almost subterranean. He could scarcely hear the crush of his own nervous footfalls. He spoke sharply to the boy:

"Mind you don't run off, kid. You wouldn't last five minutes in this jungle. Remember, I've got the eats."

The boy did not answer.

There was nothing to fear; yet the man walked softly. The forest was dark, silent. It laid a chill on his blood. This was only because of the trees. There was no real meaning to the darkness, the silence, yet he could not eject the cold fear from his blood. The mountains were forbidding to look upon. But they were only stone—living stone rearing up to the sky, and rotting stone crumbling into soil. In them was no power for harm other than in the gentle face of a fat meadow.

Thus the man made brave with argument, forgetting that when the eternal twilight of the forest struck into him there struck, with it, the chill of ancient meaningful horror-memories. And so frightful, so intense these memories were, that although his blood may have come down through the veins of a million weaselish men, Time had failed to blot them out or soften their horror.

IT was in the shaded space below the lowest limbs of the firs—a hundred feet from ground—that the man saw the first wilderness creature. It was a mottled owl in flight. Outside the forest it was summer noon. Within, the owl hunted. He swung in view just for a moment. Without darting in their sockets, his bold round eyes swept over the man, and the man told himself that the owl's eyes, and the eyes of all the wilderness, were utterly indifferent to him. In its talons the owl clutched the sagging, lifeless body of a silver squirrel.

The *whish* of wings was gone into the darkness it had come out of. The little man spoke sharply.

"Keep closer, kid."

Through his weasel teeth he laughed. There was no meaning in the flight of an owl. The wilderness could not rob him of his stolen boy. He had only to browse around a few days. . . . . No one suspected he had entered the mountains. When the search for him had cooled, he would make his way out. There were pals to hide him. There would be letters—then money.

At evening the man and boy were wearily dragging through a softer, moister country. Heavy vine-growths choked the forest. They crossed a bog, glimpsed daylight ahead, and the man cursed the boy into keeping up.

What if they were buried deeply in the mountains? To come out again they had only to follow any stream back to the Siuslaw. The wilderness was terrifying—but it was only rock contorted into rough shapes, and wood hugely overgrown into towering trees. There were no eyes in rock and wood. In the forest, eyes lurked, to be sure, but all, like the eyes of the owl, were indifferent to him. That was better than the eyes that filled the streets of cities.

But there were eyes—and not indifferent eyes—to see him. As the weasel-man pattered from the lowland jungle into the open fern-brake, Black Buck, watching, felt a sudden pleasant thrill.

It had nothing to do with the man; him Buck's gaze rested on only for an instant. It had to do with the stumbling creature behind the man—a hatless, barelegged little creature who walked upright, leaving the trail of a cub bear's hind feet—a little boy with his strength far gone, and his eyes long since cried dry.

The man made camp. Although Black Buck could not see boy or man, he continued to gaze across the fern.

HERE he was safely hidden with his stolen boy. He need no longer fear pursuit. His weasel teeth protruded when he laughed, and they protruded often. He divided crackers, cheese and little tins of meat into six portions. In six days he would be back at the railroad—and his pals would be patrolling and looking for him. He had won into secure hiding. The wilderness was threatening, but he was making it serve him.

He turned to the boy with food. The little one was lying head downhill, hard asleep. Eating the food himself, the man looked around as if to see that all was well, and remembering that the dangers of the mountains were his protection, he also lay down to sleep.

The sad summer howl of a wolf brought him wide awake. The song of the locusts was ended. The world was vast and still.

Yet the cry of the wolf reëchoed in his head, and he was suddenly aware, out of what knowledge he knew not, that the mountains of stone and wood were peopled with all the olden skulking creatures germane to them.

Aslant the high sky invisible wings fluttered, and a snapping came out of the air. The boy slept on. The little man popped up on his haunches. They should not rob him of his plunder.

But these were only the noises of harmless creatures. There was no sense or system in the wilderness. It wasn't out to get him. He was safe. He saw two red coals in the wall of the night. They were motionless, and fastened on him. He lost himself in gazing into them. Two by two the coals came forward, forming a part-circle around the man. There was a quavering cry barely to be heard in the distance, and it was now a very familiar cry. Nor did the terror that was choking him seem new and strange, although he had never before felt terror. It was as if older ears within his ears were trembling at the familiar dread cry. New pairs of coals filled in the circle around him. Over all the world was silence and wilderness peace.

In a disordered way the weasel-man's brain began again to function. He could not take his eyes from the round coals that had first bored into him. But he could move. He found that he could move his hand. He worked it under his arm and drew out a short revolver. He had used it —not long since. He feared he had not reloaded it.

That took both hands. He found the cartridge-box. It rattled; there was a move among the shadowy forms and the red eyes. A few cartridges rolled about in the box: he forced his fingers to clutch hold of one. He broke the gun, but it had been reloaded, and six heavy cartridges fell out and were lost on the ground. He found the chambers, and got in the three cartridges remaining in the box, and worked the cylinder until he believed the first shell was in position.

Where to shoot? With his unsteady hand he could not hit the red eyes. If he had only brought his flash-lamp. . . . . *Fire!* The idea leaped up out of ancient knowledge. *Fire!* He found a match, scratched it, found another, lighted a frond of dead fern, drew in more fern and stray limbs fetched from miles away by winter winds.

The flames were roasting his flesh; he grudgingly withdrew an inch. The red-eyed creatures withdrew and took up places without the range of the light. One remained. The little boy sat up suddenly and looked at this creature—a great shaggy black dog who in turn stared at the boy.

"Come, doggy!" said the boy.

Buck felt the heat of the flames. He turned away into the blackness.

THE weasel-man's teeth protruded and chattered, and his skin prickled with sweat. He squeaked to the boy:

"I chased 'em out, hey, kid? I got their little kid goats that time, hey?"

The boy stared after the dog.

Muttering, the man piled more limbs on the fire. It was just another case of a good brain at the right time. There was always a way, if a man kept cool an' looked for it. These rabbit-eating kiyis couldn't sit in a game with a man. The little old fear of fire was one too many for them. Man, he could handle fire. He started it with a match and stamped it out when he was through. The jungle'd have to spring something better than kiyis. The jungle only had just so many tricks in its kit. He, he always had one more. And he had earned that million-dollar kid. The jungle wasn't going to cheat him out of the kid.

Nevertheless he knew he had not destroyed the wolves. Beyond the firelight their eyes still glowed. He plied the fire until morning, dozed awhile beside the embers, divided breakfast with the boy and started out.

"We'll shove back toward the railroad," he said. "No use in our comin' in here so far yesterday, anyway. We'll kill time an' take it easy."

The boy kept silence. His level, weary eyes did not even acknowledge the words. He trudged along behind the nervous weasel.

That day the weasel avoided the darkest stands of timber.

The wolves had fled before the sun, but Black Buck, their leader, had not. He was deeply and strangely stirred. It was not the presence of the man. The man was only an enemy, and not enough of an enemy to be interesting. It was the boy with the feet of a bear. The tracks he left were a cub bear's hind-feet tracks. But he was not a bear; nor yet was he a man. Buck had never seen so small a man. His puppyhood master, and all men since, had

been big. Nor had he ever known a man to walk with the feet of a bear.

There was that to the problem also which went deeper than the strangeness of the boy. Buck felt it dimly; it led him on and on in the trail of the two. Sometimes he came silently in sight, stopping with a paw uplifted to watch the boy disappear ahead.

Repeatedly he nosed the tracks, but that told him nothing. To his eyes they were the tracks of a bear. Then surely this creature was a bear—and Buck had no interest in bears, save to harry and tantalize them. But Buck had only to run up and glimpse the creature to know that he was not a bear—and to be troubled by an insurgent urge within him that he could not understand. Had he obeyed this wholly ridiculous urge, he would have romped up to the boy and foolishly sprawled at his feet.

That night when the flames of the man's fire leaped up, Buck crawled close among the shadows. He saw the boy rolling and squirming on the ground in his sleep, and he crept closer, his great eyes following every movement. He could not know that the boy, in his exhausted dreams, was hearing, as from out of infinity, the call of a father and mother. At one time the boy answered them in a wild cry; the weasel-man snarled at him, and Buck sprang up, bristling, fangs bared at the man.

Cringing close to his fire, the weasel-man pointed his gun and screamed at the dog.

"Git out, damn you. I got one trick left for you, an' by God you'll get it."

His gun wavered. The whole circle of red-eyes, following Buck's lead, was closing in. The man stood swaying over his fire. The clothing on his legs began to burn.

Buck whirled. The boy cried out. Wolves were springing on him—and Buck was springing on them. The foremost he smashed with his shoulder; he slid over him to the throat of the second.

The fight went off in a whirl in the dark. And presently the circle of waiting wolves, one short of its former number, re-formed about the fire, and only broke up with the dawn.

THE trail of the man was aimless. Often he stopped. Through the idle days Buck followed, and at night he gazed with golden fluorescent eyes on the strange little boy who walked with the feet of a bear. Buck was puzzled beyond understanding, and stirred in a way he was unable to fathom or answer. Often he caught himself starting to romp up to the boy. And hour after hour he would lie with his nose in the boy's tracks, disturbed by a strange unwolfish impulse within him.

The blood that he sometimes found in the boy's tracks told him nothing, for his nose was dead; and he did not touch the blood with his tongue.

Buck had never known children. But as nights fled, and he studied the boy, his mixed feelings cleared. He came to feel guardianship over him. It was a strong protectorship; the wolves respected it, and they knew it did not extend to the man.

Came the night among the trees, when the man could find no open place in which to camp. As always, wolves came, and in the shadows of the trees crept closer than ever before. Buck likewise crept closer. He studied the flames and the boy. He did not fear the flames. He was not a wolf, equipped with cunning and burdened with the fear of fire.

FIRE was strange to him. Only in hazy memories of his puppyhood had he knowledge of fire, and in dim dreams, blended with these memories, reaching back down the ladder of a million years. Gazing into the leaping flames, he felt that they were familiar. He knew the man was his enemy and the tousle-haired boy his friend. He belonged beside the boy.

The weasel-man got up on his knees and laid a branch on the fire. The darkness was full of eyes—the red eyes of the waiting. Always they waited, as if gifted with foreknowledge. With them waited the whole vast night. As the flames leaped, the man saw the waiting ones retreating out of the light—shadowy, shaggy forms, wide faces, oblique eyes, white fangs. They had been with him every night since he had entered the wilderness. They were the wilderness—the wilderness night. His teeth protruded, and suddenly he screamed at them:

"Whaddaya want? Whaddaya waitin' for?"

The little boy sat up, and the man cried, shrilly:

"You stay closer to me."

He piled on more limbs, and squatted beside the roaring fire. Flames—they were his protection.

As silence fell again, Buck edged toward

the fire. He would put out a paw and carefully hitch forward. Then he would repeat the movement. This brought him to the side of the boy. Buck touched the warm arm with his muzzle. Mumbling in his sleep and rolling, the boy threw out an arm, and it fell across the great neck of the dog. Buck trembled the length of his frame. He was warm, and the sleeping boy drew the huge killing head down to his, and curled his body against the dog's. Buck's pulses pounded. With his whole body he was guarding and warming the child. His eyes blazed as before, but now they were not the eyes of the wilderness bent upon the boy, but the eyes of man's ancient watchdog glaring defiance into the hungry, patient night.

IT was the next day that the man began to believe the wilderness—the mere stone-and-wood wilderness—had a spirit. He was quite mad, and very much a suspicious weasel. It was his eighth day out, and his second without food. He stopped often in the salal to gather berries. There were many salal berries. They were seedy and sharp. He chewed them greedily, and grew weaker.

The boy did not eat so many berries. When the man stopped, which was often, he would tumble down and lie still until the man ordered him up. His blue eyes were still wide, but they were obscured with blood. His face was quite black.

Foot by foot they fought their way up the side of a great hog's-back ridge. They went slowly, and after every climb of a few steps the man would rest. Whenever he rested, his gaze would travel up until it came to the top of the ridge.

It was a high ridge, a very high ridge. From the bottom the man had marked a lone chinquapin tree on the side of the ridge as the halfway point. When he reached the chinquapin, he found it only a short way down to the cañon, and a much longer way up to the top.

He could not remember the ridge. It must lie along the railroad. By now his pals, watching on the railroad, would be anxious for him to come out of the mountains. He must have swung above or below the point where he had first left the cañon of the Siuslaw and the railroad. As he drove himself and the boy up the ridge, his ears strained to catch the roar of the Siuslaw, and his teeth protruded at the thought of success.

They made the last climb up the ridge carpeted with lush grass. It was hot midday; gasping for breath, the man ran through the grass, out on a jutting prow that overlooked the country on the other side of the ridge. He dropped down, panting and listening.

A dull roar, rising and falling like a song, came up from the toy forest far below. He could not see the river. The cañon was thickly forested. But there had been no roar like that since leaving the railroad. It was the Siuslaw. He was done with the wilderness. He felt suddenly very strong.

He looked for the boy. Nowhere could he see him. Rushing back, the weasel-man found him, unconscious and exhausted, and dragged him to the top. He did not curse the boy. He told him of the Siuslaw.

"Easy goin' for us, kid," he chirped. "Downhill this afternoon. Tonight, or tomorrow anyway, we'll meet the boys. Then it'll be eats for us. A few days' layin' around, then back to Daddy for you, an' a big piece of jack for yours truly."

THEY almost tumbled down the ridge. The roar of rushing water grew louder. It was like victorious music and the weasel-man thought he could see the river between every break in the trees. But on rubbing his eyes and staring hard, the river always disappeared. Where was the river? There was no river. Yet he could hear it—beyond denial he could hear it.

The weasel-man became excited. He seized the boy's hand and rushed along the cañon. Suddenly he stopped and listened, to make sure he was going in the direction of the river. The roar was even louder. He rushed on.

The cañon wound downward, twisted around a mountain, and the man was out of sight of the great ridge he had climbed. And ahead, shortly ahead, was a break in the fir forest. He saw fallen trees. Out there the evening sunshine danced.

And then he came into the open, and stared dumbly, and his green little teeth thrust out through his lips. With a crumpling motion he sat down, still staring.

He was at the foot of a drift. A funnel-like gulley ran back for two miles among the mountains. Long tributary gulleys flowed into it. In the great main gulley was the drift.

The forest for miles was a thing of shattered ranks. On some mountain-sides were vast blowdowns, where gales from off the

Pacific had flattened the trees. Fire had swept others, and the stripped, stark trunks stood like a forest of toothpicks. Everywhere on these mountain-sides were fallen trunks—all fallen downhill. They had crashed into the little gulleys, slid into the main gulley, and there the mass of its own immense weight crawled slowly to the cañon. At its mouth it traveled thirty yards a year.

The drift was hundreds of feet deep. There were tumbled, twisted acres of huge logs, and here and there a rock rode upon the mass. It was a great glacier of the softwood forests; and its chaotic surface could not be crossed with safety as the surface of an ice glacier of the north, nor could the summer sun drive it back and destroy it. The thick trees that had stood at the mouth of the gulley had broken down before it.

From underneath it trickled a little stream; and the chattering of this hidden water reverberating through the resonant logs was like the roar of a mountain river.

The weasel-man could not take his eyes from the drift. He had not known the things that take place—in the mountains. Wrecked streets he had seen, with buildings toppled into them. That had not been like this.

He remembered the ridge he had spent his last strength upon, and wondered vaguely where the Siuslaw was. The sun was setting—in the east. He looked around; and if his senses had been fresh, he would have recoiled. What ridge to climb, had he been able to climb, he could not decide. Nothing was in sight but other ridges, and towering back of these were other ridges, and through clefts in them he saw endless blue seas of still more ridges. They closed in on every side,—endless, impassable. They were not mere wood and stone to hide him from wrathful men. They wanted to crush him. That was it: they were after him; they had been after him from the first. He remembered the owl and squirrel, and the stenchy breaths of wolves at night. And suddenly the suspicion crept over him that the wilderness had a spirit and he cried out to the wilderness:

"Whaddaya want? Whaddaya want?"

A sharp crack, like the report of a long naval rifle, came from the river of ruined trees. The man leaped to his feet. The drift was still. The world was still. Then a mile back on the surface of the drift a log shot up. It was a two-hundred-foot log, but it looked like a match flipped into the air. As it fell, a six-foot-thick log at the mouth of the drift, close to the man, bowed up in the middle as though it were a sapling, higher and higher, and crashed in two with a screech and shower of long splinters.

At the screech the man fled into the timber. His legs were quickened with the terror that flowed through him. The mountains were after him. They had promised him shelter, only to lose him here, and now they had turned a great avalanche loose on him.

They didn't want him to get away with the kid. The kid was money. He had earned him—with his wits, with his gun—almost with his life. If he could only get him back to the railroad!

He stopped running. The boy was not with him. He stood stock still in frenzy. Had the kid finally been stolen from him? Carefully he made his way back. He looked out of the timber.

The drift was still. It had crawled forward an inch, and stopped.

The boy was not in sight. There was a dog—a great shaggy black dog—where the boy had been. The man held his revolver against a tree and aimed. There was something queer about the dog. There was something around his neck. It was the arm of the little boy, who stood beside the dog; and his sobs came plainly to the weasel-man.

"Come out of it!" he snarled. "Come here, you little devil,—or I'll shoot the dog."

The boy pushed Buck away, and came slowly. Buck watched him go, puzzled and undecided.

"Don't monkey with that dog; he's wild; he'll chew you up. Now let's get outa this."

NOT knowing which way to turn, he went the easiest way, down the cañon. It was night in the woods. They crossed a damp lowland and saw, through the trees, a lighter fern meadow ahead. The lowland sloped into the fern. Buck was following the pair, and there were other and strange eyes waiting to see what might come out of the lowland thickets.

They were resting in a copse of gray cascara trees on the edge of the fern when the man dodged behind a tree, jerking the boy with him. Cattle were in front of him—cattle, slaves of man. The Weasel

did not know they were wild cattle, hating man as only the children of slaves can hate. His hands trembled as he aimed at the largest—the herd bull.

At his shot the bull, and the herd, seemed stupefied. All stood motionless, heads raised. He fired again; the bull sighed and sank down, got on his feet and ran a short distance. The others, with the smell of blood in their nostrils, stampeded.

Rushing across the glade, the man threw himself on the bull, fastening his feverish lips to the wound. The boy watched. Night fell; there were rustlings near by! The man built a fire to beat back the darkness.

The weasel-man built his fire beside his kill, and dragging in branches for fuel, he found an old fire-bed—a heap of ashes. He thought other travelers were in the forest. He thought he knew why they were there. He did not recognize it as the place where he had spent his first night in the forest. He looked at it critically. It was recent.

He considered stamping out his fire. But already eyes were gleaming in the fern. Whoever had camped there before him was gone. The wolves were not gone. He piled his fire with fir limbs until the crackling flames shot high into the darkness.

Fastening a chunk of meat on a stick, he held it in the fire. He was grinning broadly with his teeth. He had meat. Meat was life. Life was escape. He patted his revolver. It had proved one too many for the mountains. The mountains might have many tricks in their kit, but he could always go them one better. They could not rob him of his kid—his hard-earned jack. He jerked the sizzling meat from the fire.

His glance darted. Something was creeping. Beyond the fire-light the blackness was full of glowing coals. The moonless sky was full of them. The crash of stampeding cattle drifted through the night. With a jerk, the carcass of the lanky bull moved. They were stealing his meat.

A cry broke from him. He rushed to the precious meat—and over it faced a pair of green-glowing cat eyes.

His cry of ownership and the crash of his revolver came together, and he flung his empty gun wildly after the bullet. Seizing a leg, he tugged furiously at the carcass, and backing, worked it inch by inch toward the fire.

The shot brought the boy from his stupor. Beside him was a great shaggy dog,—a dog who had gazed at the boy and the fire until his awakening had come,—and a rough tongue was licking his face. He let the dog go, and the dog faded into the darkness, turned, and with his strangely shining eyes coaxed the boy to follow. When the boy did not move, he stalked back. This time the boy buried his hands in the thick curled hair of the dog's shoulders.

SNARLING and important, feverish with glorious guardian instincts, Buck went through the line of waiting wolves and into the dark with the boy clinging fast to him. And behind him a man screamed, cursed, ran into the shadows—and at a touch of fur and a click of teeth that ripped his sleeve, sprang back to crouch, gibbering, beside the fire. The Weasel was wholly mad. The last trick in his kit was played. The kid he had stolen and fought for was taken away; an inescapable circle of red eyes surrounded him; and the patient night waited. His teeth clashed uncontrollably. His hands worked, and went again and again to his revolver-pocket. They drew out at length a bit of dirty rag and when the Weasel saw it, he stared at it in his hands, then swiped it nervously across the pointed toes of his sorry, battered shoes.

Where a little creek comes down into the lowland, Black Buck finally stopped, lapped a few drinks and looked out to see what he might see: the wilderness is an ever-new world. Holding to him with tight little fingers was the boy who walked like a bear. Down in the lush lowland, mad cattle crashed and bawled, stampeding because their leader was lost. A stray wolf, hastening to join the waiting circle, howled now and again, and always closer. In the distance, at the head of the lowland, was the dull gleam of a fire.

The cattle smashed toward it. There came confused bawlings, and before the bawlings stopped, there was a sudden high, shrill sound. Then the fire was blotted out.

The world was strange. Buck suspected there was a nest of wood-rats in a certain cedar-log. His nose could not verify this suspicion, so he made a noisy scratching atop of the sonorous wood, and when a rat scampered out, he shot after it, fetched it, and laid it before the boy. But the boy was sprawled in sleep. Buck licked his face a little, and throughout the night stood proud guard.

All Square

The ancient and honorable game of golf twice proves a turning point in Jimmy Brooks' career.

By Eugene White Nixon

IT was either too much golf or too little golf, according to one's attitude toward the game, that caused brilliant young Jimmy Brooks to lose his position with the C. R. Ellington Company when his prospects were the brightest.

For of course one might argue that it wasn't so much Jimmy's enthusiasm for golf that brought about his misfortune, as it was the awful grouch old C. R. had on that morning. And undoubtedly Ellington's indigestion, or liver-trouble, or whatever it was that had been making him miserable, resulted from a lack of golf, and of any other healthful physical exercise.

Then too, the physicians old C. R. had consulted had made him sore at golf. It seemed that they must have been getting a rake-off from the golf professionals, for they all told C. R. that exercise in the open air was what he needed, and they all recommended golf.

"Damned nonsense," was C. R.'s disgusted comment anent this prescription. "It's my stomach that's out of order, not my mind. Whenever I have to play golf to keep alive, I'll take sulphuric acid."

But on this particular morning two items that he noted in his favorite paper probably were directly responsible for C. R.'s discharging his most competent employee like an angry golfer breaking his putter.

The first of these items was a front-page editorial commenting on the recent defeat of the American contenders for the English golf-championship. The comment, exactly to C. R.'s mind, ran something like this:

"If Americans are to be beaten in any form of activity, let it be at golf. It is not to be wondered at that American young men play golf poorly; the wonder is that they play such a senseless game at all, especially when there is work to be done in the world."

"A bunch of bums and loafers—ought to be a law prohibiting such foolishness," commented Ellington to himself angrily as he turned away in disgust from his untouched omelette. C. R.'s stomach was especially bad this morning.

Turning to the financial page, he stumbled accidentally upon an excellent picture of the smiling Jimmy Brooks in the sporting department. A footnote informed

him that the popular Jimmy Brooks of the Allendale Club was a "semifinalist" in the race for the City championship, then in progress, a round a week, and that Jimmy was a favorite to win because his form was little short of perfection, measured by the standards set by Harry Vardon, Chick Evans and other masters of the mashie.

"A golfing semifinalist, eh?" commented Ellington to himself with a darker scowl than ever. "And I thought I was going to make him my acting general manager. Semifinalist and master of the mashie!"—bitterly ironic. "Short pants and rolling a ball into a hole in the ground, with work to do at the office—hell and Maria!"

You see, Jimmy had been playing golf ever since he had been old enough to qualify as a caddy. But Jimmy was tactful. He had never thought it any more necessary to bring the fact to Ellington's attention than to go out and wave the well-known red rag at somebody's bull.

BUT as the wrathful Ellington ground the sporting page under his heel and chewed the huge black cigar that he knew would only add to his misery, and while his troubled eyes took in the details of declining prices as tabulated in the financial columns, a far different scene was being enacted in the little vine-covered cottage out near the Allendale Golf Club, where Jimmy Brooks and his mother lived.

No intestinal disturbances darkened the life or spirits of Jimmy Brooks. Jimmy didn't know a thing about his internal anatomy, and he hadn't the slightest curiosity to find out. This morning Jimmy was devouring a substantial breakfast with peculiar satisfaction, for he had been up since before six o'clock practising that famous mashie approach, the account of which had so aroused Ellington's wrath. His exercise and cold bath had left him hungry as a wolf, and glowing with health and enthusiasm. Jimmy was full of the old pep this morning—he would make things hum at the office.

"I'm awfully proud of you, son," smiled his mother across the tiny breakfast-table as she indicated the picture of the handsome athlete on the sporting page.

"Thanks, Mother," he replied. "But I wish they had left my picture out till after the finals. It's bad luck to be touted for a winner that way. No matter how good a golfer a man is, he is always liable to blow up."

Jimmy was a wise golfer.

"Well, we've got a lot of work to do at the office, and I must get there early," he added. "Have to forget golf till tomorrow afternoon."

AN hour later the suffering C. R. Ellington, in his private office at the Ellington plant, hurled the macerated remains of a second black cigar into the waste-paper basket, slammed down a report that he had been studying with increasing rage, and gave the desk button a vicious jab.

"Mr. Brooks, immediately," he ordered the lad who answered the call.

"Gosh, what a grouch!" thought the boy; and as he hurried through the outer office, he wrinkled his face and spread his hands outward and heavenward, indicating to all observers that the old man was on a worse rampage than usual this beautiful morning.

"Brooks," said Ellington,—he usually called him Jimmy,—"Brooks, there's hell to pay up at the Eldorado branch,"—indicating with a flourish the offending report, —"and I want you to go up there on the night train tonight and see what's the matter. You'll have tomorrow afternoon and Sunday to go over the business."

Ellington turned back to his correspondence, reaching for another black cigar. If Jimmy made good on this assignment, C. R. would likely make him his general manager in spite of his golf, for Ellington was beginning to see that he would have to lighten his own work somewhat. "Why the devil does a man have to have a stomach, anyhow?"

But Jimmy did not speak or move. For once in his life Jimmy Brooks, the confident, smiling, imperturbable Jimmy, was nonplused. For tomorrow afternoon was the last day allowed for play in the semi-final round of the City championship, and he must play or default. He was one of four left in the race out of the original two hundred entrants. Every member of the Allendale Club was backing him in some fashion or other to win the tournament. The City championship was one of the biggest events of the year in sports. Jimmy was playing a brand of golf that would soon put him among the leading amateurs of America. What was he to do?

Now, Jimmy was not accustomed to hesitate, either over the choice of a club with which to make an approach-shot over a yawning trap from a nasty lie, or over

a question of allowing Quigly and Sons credit on a five-thousand-dollar order. Almost immediately his decision was made.

"Mr. Ellington," he said with a return of the smiling confidence that had carried him so far in golf and in the estimation of C. R. Ellington, and which had always made him immune to Ellington's lightning-like wrath, "I hate to ask a favor of this kind, but would you object if I went up there tomorrow night instead of tonight? I could straighten things out there in short order."

"What's the matter with tonight?"

Ellington had whirled about and was glaring in a manner that boded ill, even for Jimmy Brooks.

Now, it was not Jimmy's style to evade issues or to invent excuses. With the same confidence with which he might have faced a six-foot putt for the City championship, he looked straight into Ellington's wrathful eyes.

"The fact is," he said, "that I am to play in the semifinal round of the City golf-championship tournament tomorrow afternoon. This is my only opportunity to play, and a good deal depends on my playing."

Now, whatever the state of Ellington's stomach, his arteries at least were still in excellent condition; for had they been otherwise he must have succumbed to apoplexy on the spot. He didn't foam at the mouth as Jimmy thought he seemed about to do, although he did snarl, a strangling snarl, low in his throat, before he could begin to speak. His face grew purple, and he seemed to swell with rage. Jimmy had never seen a man in such a temper, even on the golf-links. At last Ellington found his voice.

"Young man," he said, his voice husky with wrath, "I've watched you for nine years, and I was going to make you general manager of this business. But you've just shown something I've been watching for particularly—lack of character. I don't care how much I think of you, I'm not going to take a chance on a man without character. And if I can't make something worth while out of you, I don't want you around here at all. Get your month's pay and get out. Go spend all your time at golf, or marbles, or making dresses for your dollies, or any damned foolishness you please. The rest of us have business to do here, and all we want out of you is your room."

He gave the button another violent jab.

"Send Wilson in here," he ordered.

As Jimmy left the office his feeling was mainly one of indignation, but by evening he was thoroughly miserable.

"I wish I had never seen a golf-club," he told his mother.

He felt worse than a man who had been put out in the first round of a tournament he had expected to win.

"So darned low I could walk under a snake's belly with a silk hat on," he told himself as he retired for a restless night.

The next day Jimmy's insignificant opponent put him out with ease. The blow of the day before, together with a sleepless night, had played such havoc with his nervous control that he had little notion whether his mashie approach-shots would go halfway to the green or over into the trap beyond.

"A flash in the pan—blowed higher than a balloon," was the disgusted comment of his erstwhile supporters. Few of them bothered to speak to him afterward.

TO Jimmy the days and weeks that followed brought little encouragement.

"I'm a good business man, and somebody will want my services," he said to himself.

But it was a bad time to be looking for a position. The fact, too, that he had no recommendation from Ellington must have been against him. He was too proud to ask help of any member of his club. At last he took, temporarily, a position as traveling salesman.

He put his golf-clubs back in his bedroom closet where they would be out of sight. He might have sold them or given them away, but he remembered that he had quit golf once or twice before, following particularly ignominious defeats at the hands of dub players who had nothing in their favor but inexplicable streaks of unrighteous good fortune.

"I might be fool enough to want to play again when I'm too old and childish to do anything else, so I'd better keep these things," he thought as he hurled them carelessly into the closet.

But upon second thought he brought the clubs out to the table, where he polished each one until it shone like a mirror. Then he coated them with a thin covering of vaseline to keep away the rust and put them tenderly away to await his second childhood. The next day he packed his

sample cases and began his career as a salesman, a career that suited him not at all.

DURING this same period, however, a most unbelievable thing happened to C. R. Ellington. It was Ed Hillman, of Hillman Brothers, who brought about this miracle. Ed was in town to make the best possible contract for a year's supply of merchandise for the great string of Hillman retail stores; and in this period of deflation and depression it was vital to C. R. to land this contract. Hillman dropped in just after the lunch-hour, and in spite of a terrible internal misery Ellington braced himself for the difficult task of "selling" this important customer.

"Ed's a darn good friend of mine," C. R. mused, "but when it comes to business, he's a hard-head—cold-blooded as a carp."

"Hello, Ed," he greeted Hillman when his visitor came in. "Gosh, but you look hearty. Been getting married since I saw you last? You look ten years younger."

"Can't say the same for you, C. R. You look something out of the morgue."

"Confounded stomach or liver or diaphragm or something gone back on me. Doctors say I've got to play golf or die, so I guess I'm due to die." C. R. was trying to be jovial, but there was bitterness in this last speech.

"Now, you listen here, C. R.," said Ed sharply at the mention of golf, "you're shooting too close to me with that golf-stuff. Want you to understand I'm a golfer myself. Yes sir, been playing two months, feel like a fighting cock, appetite like a farmhand, ten years younger, drive a ball two hundred yards, can't hole a two-foot putt into a washtub, but I'll bet fourteen dollars I can take you out, C. R., and beat you on every one of the eighteen holes."

Ellington was too astounded at this speech to reply. "Hard-headed Ed Hillman gone nutty about golf! Good night! What next?"

"Come on, C. R.," Ed continued. "We'll get into my car and run out to the Hillcrest Club, and we'll talk over this contract while we play. You'll never get me to hang around this stuffy place to talk business. No sir, I've cut it out—think too much of my health."

"You go to the devil with your golf," was what C. R. wanted to reply, but what he did say was: "I never saw a game of golf in my life, Ed, and I never want to. But I'll ride out with you."

"Yes, you'll ride out with me, and you'll play a round of golf with me, too, C. R., if you want to do business with me. I'm going to save your life first, C. R., and then if you're good, and keep your fool head down, and your eye on the ball, and don't talk while I putt, maybe I'll buy some of your rotten stuff."

THE story of Ellington's fall is briefly told. When they reached Hillcrest, Ed rented a set of clubs for C. R.'s use, and by an extraordinary exhibition of physical and moral force dragged Ellington with him to the first tee, totally ignoring his protests.

"I've got to land this contract," C. R. said to himself, "and while I'm here, I might as well find out what makes these feeble-minded boobs so crazy about golf."

But even with this worthy purpose in view he looked sheepishly about to see whether any acquaintances were observing his disgrace.

"I'll shoot first," said Ed, "and show you how it ought to be done." And presently he sent off a very decent drive.

"When you get so you can do that, C. R., you'll be a real man," he exulted.

And indeed, in spite of himself, Ellington found something slightly stimulating in Ed's accomplishment.

"Whatever you do, do better than the other fellow," had always been Ellington's motto. Following this rule, he subordinated everything else, for the time being, to the determination to outdo Ed's drive. Setting himself, as Ed had done, with feet wide apart and every muscle of his powerful frame tense, he drew back the driver with a tremendous jerk, and then brought it forward again in a terrific swing with force enough to drive the ball three hundred yards.

But something must have gone wrong. There was no shock of impact—no crash of club against ball. Instead only a futile *swish* as the club cut through the air. Ellington drew in his head sharply as the uncontrolled shaft finished the circle perilously close to his face.

When Ellington lowered his gaze from heavenward, where he had expected to see the ball sailing far in graceful flight, and when he observed the little white pill still resting serenely upon its fragile tee, his expression was ludicrous. His astonish-

ment, embarrassment and disgust were all summed up in his explosive: "What the hell?"

At C. R.'s third attempt to hit the ball, however, some freak of beginner's luck allowed him to hit a clean drive straight down the fairway almost two hundred yards.

Now, a golfer finds something extremely thrilling about his first good drive—something comparable to the first kiss of love about which the poets rave. Even case-hardened old C. R. Ellington was perilously near a smile as he strode down the beautiful green fairway toward the distant ball. He would show the amused Ed Hillman that he was not a man to be monkeyed with, even at such a fool game as this.

When they finally holed out at the eighteenth green after three hours of adventures that carried Ellington more than once through the entire range of human emotions, Ed finally broached the subject of business.

"What's your best price, C. R.?"

Ellington named a figure that both knew to be an honest one.

"What terms?"

"F. O. B. and C. O. D.," Ellington replied.

"Make out the contract and I'll drop around tomorrow and sign it, and we'll have another round of golf."

THAT evening Ellington astounded his wife and daughter by demanding and eating several helpings of substantial food, despite all warnings of dire results to follow. After dinner he was overcome by an indescribable sense of physical weariness. The work he had done that afternoon would have made a farmhand weary.

Soon his head began to nod, and within an hour C. R. retired to his bed, where in spite of the blisters on his feet and the aching of his tortured muscles, he slept like the dead until awakened by his hunger, a fierce hunger that demanded a breakfast of bacon and eggs, potatoes, toast and coffee.

That afternoon Ed Hillman, calling to sign the contract, found it considerably easier to drag Ellington out to the links. Within a month C. R. had forgotten that he had ever had a stomach. He had even forgotten ever having had a prejudice against golf. Three or four afternoons a week found him at the links. Another hard-headed business man had fallen victim to the mysterious but infallible charms of the siren.

MEANTIME Jimmy Brooks had been devoting himself to the career of a traveling salesman. The genial and hard-working Jimmy was a very good salesman, too. But Jimmy was a natural executive, and the outlook failed to impress him. Finally he resigned his position, with the determination to secure another more to his liking.

One afternoon, strolling over to the golf-club, which he had not visited for almost a year, he happened upon Howard Allison, enthusiastic golfer and sportsman, prominent automobile dealer and one of Jimmy's former admirers.

"Well, well," greeted Allison, "where in the world has our little Jimmy been all these months? And why does our finest little golfer throw us down this way? You ought to be a movie queen, Jimmy, with that temperament."

"It isn't temperament, Howard," Jimmy replied. "It's work that's got the worst of me. An honest man like me has to work for a living—can't loaf around a golf-club all day like a lot of you highway robbers."

Jimmy went on to tell Allison something of the state of affairs in which he found himself involved. Suddenly an inspiration seemed to come to Allison.

"Jimmy," he said, "I'll tell you what you do. You lay off this honest labor stuff for the next month and practise for the City championship. You can win it easy—you'd have won it last year if you had only kept your mind on the game. If you win it this time, I'll give you a job at a thousand dollars a month."

At this unexpected offer Jimmy was as surprised as a golfer holing out a tee shot for a "one."

"You see, Jimmy," Allison continued, "I'm to have the State agency for the Haggard Duplex Six, the classiest car in America; and I figure that a popular champion like you'll be can earn at least twice that much for us by playing with the rich dubs around the city clubs, and telling them about the new car you represent. Why, a lot of these eighteen-handicap millionaires would just about give eight thousand dollars to be able to tell about winning a couple of holes from a champion."

The offer made an undeniable impression on Jimmy. Of course he could see that there was something about this offer that

didn't jibe with the highest standards of ethics in amateur sports. But just what was wrong with it? It was a little hard to see. Anyhow, more than one champion was getting away with the same kind of a deal, and nobody seemed to be making any fuss about it.

"Of course it's all right," Allison assured him. "They all do it. Ever read some of the stuff our champion athletes sell the newspapers and magazines? Why, if they weren't champions they'd be arrested for robbery."

At length Jimmy allowed himself to be persuaded, although with a vague feeling that all was not right. But he could save enough in a couple of years to give him a boost in the business world; and considering the trouble golf had brought him, it seemed that some advantage was due him from the game.

WITH a few days' practice Jimmy's skill returned. He had imitated the best strokes of the greatest masters of the game from Harry Vardon to Jim Barnes and Jock Hutchinson, and his game was a thing of beauty.

The qualifying round of the City championship as usual brought out all the leading amateur golfers of a dozen clubs. Jimmy Brooks showed the quality of his game by leading the field with a score of seventy strokes, a new amateur record for the Hillcrest Club. But the critics about the clubhouse shook their heads at the mention of his name.

"Can't stand the strain of match play—something lacking there," they said with an air of profound wisdom. They remembered his blow-up of the year before.

But Jimmy waded through his first three opponents with no signs of unsteadiness. In the semifinals, however, he gave his first intimation of an approaching blow-up. He was three holes up at the turn, but somehow he got to thinking about the ethics of selling automobiles on the strength of one's skill as a golfer, and before he could get his mind back on the game Worthington had squared the match. Jimmy finally pulled it out of the fire with a twenty-foot putt at the seventeenth green.

The final match between Jimmy and Bob Hilton, the champion, did not prove as brilliant as had been expected; for as usual in such affairs, both men were beginning to show signs of the strain of the contest. However, the play had one virtue from the standpoint of the spectator—a close finish.

By all rights the match should have ended in Jimmy's favor considerably before the thirty-sixth hole, for throughout the morning round Jimmy showed a definite superiority that gave him a lead of two holes. The afternoon round proceeded in much the same fashion, and at the conclusion of the fifteenth hole Jimmy still retained his advantage. He was two holes up, and only three remained to be played. If he could win one more hole, the championship would be his. But at this point the blow-up that the wiseacres had been predicting seemed to have come to pass. For as Jimmy moved from the green to the tee he suddenly came face to face with C. R. Ellington and his daughter.

Now, Jimmy had been at particular pains to exclude the large gallery of spectators from his consciousness. Even yet he might have passed within three feet of Ellington without noticing him. But the presence of Frances Ellington within such a range was a different matter. His gaze was drawn toward her as by some invisible attraction.

He recognized Frances with a conscious start, and the friendly and encouraging smile upon her lovely face set his heart to racing far faster than the excitement of the match had done. Jimmy bowed awkwardly and passed on to the tee, considerably shaken.

WHAT were the Ellingtons doing here, he wondered as he teed up his ball. What was the meaning of the smile Frances Ellington had given him? Jimmy had been trying for a year to forget that he had been violently in love with beautiful Frances Ellington. He had supposed he would forget her in time, especially since she seemed so far away from him. But her smile had revived an old ache.

"The yellow streak again," was the thought in the mind of more than one spectator in the excited gallery as Jimmy lost the next two holes by poor play.

Jimmy himself did not fully realize his predicament until he had sliced his ball into the rough at the eighteenth tee, with the match all square and Hilton's ball far down the fairway. But as he strode over to where his caddy had finally located his ball after a short search in the rough, he began to pull himself together. He had scarcely ever been in such a difficult posi-

tion, but there was still a chance if he could make a clean "out," and for the moment Jimmy concentrated upon his stroke as a champion should.

Fortunately he had a fairly good lie. Taking a mid-mashie he tore into the ball with all the force in his athletic frame: he must carry the Devil's pit by all odds. For a moment Jimmy wondered if he hadn't overdone it a little—he thought of the awful trap beyond the green. But the ball dropped dead as only the champions drop them, took a couple of feeble bounds, rolled a couple of feet, and to the astonishment of everyone but Jimmy, stopped a yard from the cup.

Following this astonishing performance the rattled Hilton put his second into the trap; his "out" was short, and Jimmy won the hole and match.

JIMMY BROOKS was considerably surprised to find Frances Ellington among the first to congratulate him. He could see that her pleasure and excitement were sincere, and he had never seen her look lovelier.

"Oh, Jimmy," she cried, flushed with enthusiasm, "wont you give an old friend like me one of the balls you played with today for a souvenir?"

"You bet I will, Frances," replied the flattered James. "I'll give you the winning ball."

But when he took the ball from the caddy, who had just retrieved it from the cup, a look of amazement came over his face.

"Here, wait a minute," he called to Hilton and the referee, who were leaving the green. "This isn't my ball—my ball was marked. The caddy must have found another ball, and I played it. Your hole, Hilton, and the match too—serves me right for not looking at the ball before I played it out there in the rough. Congratulations, Hilton."

The now defeated Jimmy turned toward the clubhouse. He carried a smile on his face, but there was bitterness in his heart. Golf had never brought him anything but misfortune. It was certainly time for him to quit for good.

Before he had taken a dozen steps, Frances Ellington overtook and stopped him. She was serious now, and deeply concerned.

"I'm awfully sorry, Jimmy. If I hadn't asked for the ball, you'd have been the winner, because no one would ever have known that you played the wrong ball."

"Why, that's just the reason I'm glad you did ask for it," replied Jimmy. "It would be a rotten thing to win a championship unfairly."

"You make me awfully proud of you," she answered. And then: "Here is Papa. He wants to speak to you," she continued.

"Jimmy," said Ellington, advancing and taking Jimmy's hand, "I've been wondering how to apologize to you. I did you a dirty trick some time back, and I ask you to forgive me."

"Glad to forgive anything, Mr. Ellington," said James with a return of the familiar smile. "But I guess you had me sized about right, at that."

"No, I didn't, Jimmy. And just to show you how far off I was, I want you to come back to us. We want a man worth at least a thousand dollars a month, and we are prepared to start you at that figure if you care to come."

By this time Jimmy was becoming somewhat accustomed to the shock of surprises. He managed to accept the flattering offer with some show of grace.

"I'm going to quit golf, too, Mr. Ellington," he added, "so I'll be a better worker."

"No, you don't," responded Ellington with a twinkle in his eye. "It's part of your job to keep yourself in good condition, and you must arrange your work so you can play regularly."

Another surprise for Jimmy. And, "I'd like to have you take me out some Wednesday afternoon and show me how you make that mashie-approach," added C. R. somewhat sheepishly.

"Now, Papa," warned Frances breaking into the conversation with an air of mock authority, "don't think you are going to monopolize Mr. Brooks' time. I am counting on having him give me a little help with my golf—that is, if the great Mr. Brooks can spare any time for the ladies."

A FEW minutes later the new employee of the C. R. Ellington Company paused in the midst of his dressing to admire his favorite mashie.

"Golf is a great game," he remarked to the world at large, "—that is, if you don't overdo it."

He whistled a few more notes, stopped and added as an afterthought: "And the beauty of golf is that it's impossible to overdo it."

The Admiral's Smile

Life in our Navy has certain interesting aspects not often described—as witness this attractive story by the author of "Mine in the Kite" and "The Hoodoo Turret."

By Warren H. Miller

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS was a gift that Midshipman Jimmy Harrod wished he hadn't. He could feel it creeping all over his tall frame, from the black pompadour of him to the polished boots of him, as Junior Lieutenant Whitten, head of the steerage mess on the dreadnaught *Montana*, told him the news.

"Jimmy, you're a handsome boot!" grinned Whitten banteringly as they met in the wardroom. "We're picking you to sit nearly opposite the Admiral at the big feed. Game for it?"

Jimmy blushed. As a cadet officer he was eligible to attend a state dinner given by the steerage mess to the Admiral. It was a most unusual occasion, even for the flagship. The wardroom, with its long lines of senior officers, once in a while invited the Admiral to a state dinner, but only special privilege would warrant the presumption of inviting the Admiral by such a youngster organization as the *Montana's* steerage mess. Jimmy was frankly afraid. That old self-consciousness of his would be sure to arise and make a boob of him if the Admiral so much as looked at him, he was sure. Still, he came of a proud old Navy family from South Carolina, most of his uncles were captains or commanders, and so he felt it up to him to make good, for the name of the family. At the last instant, however, he hesitated.

"Buck Thompson's invited too, isn't he?" he began to hedge. "He's a class above me, and a cadet captain. Frankly, Lieutenant, I'd rather you stuck me down somewhere near the end of the table and kept me out of trouble. Let him take the place—please, sir."

Whitten laughed: "Buck Thompson'd give the Admiral the fidgets! He's that homely the engine of his motor-sailer stops every time he looks at it. No, Jimmy, your fatal beauty is against you. You're elected, all right! We've got to have all our best-looking youngsters around the Admiral. Here's your place—next to the Captain, who will sit directly opposite."

He placed a card at the table seat al-

ready set by the mess-boys. Jimmy gazed at it fascinated, standing on one foot with bashfulness, while Whitten stood and grinned heartlessly.

"All right, sir," agreed Jimmy resignedly. "Hope I don't have to say much."

"Nothing at all!" said Whitten heartily. "Just sit there and look handsome, Jeems! Festive raiment. Be sure your whites are fresh, starched and spotless."

He turned away hurriedly to give some more orders to the head *"insurrecto"* as the steerage called the Filipino mess-boys.

JIMMY felt the old blue funk stealing over him during the two hours before mess. He tried on half a dozen suits before he was satisfied, and was in a thoroughly miserable state by the time he joined the ensigns and junior lieutenants in the steerage. He and Buck Thompson were the only two middies invited from their quarters during practice cruise, and that only because they were cadet officers. He felt lonely and out of place; and Buck did not help him much, for he was a hazer and had loved to rub it in on Jimmy whenever he got the chance at the Academy. He kept down near his place far away toward the foot of the table and met Jimmy's shy advances with his usual sarcastic raillery. Jimmy sought the company of a friendly ensign in preference.

"Gentlemen—the Admiral!" announced Lieutenant Whitten, rising to head the receiving delegation. All in snowy white, with gleaming shoulder-straps and flashing gold buttons, the steerage mess rose in a body and stood at salute at the words. The door opened, and Rear Admiral Haley Johnson, commander in chief of the Nth Battle Division, entered, escorted by the captain of the *Montana*.

Jimmy became aware of a great, powerful man with bulldog face and stern gray eyes over a heavy white mustache, who stood smiling affably and shaking hands with the young junior lieutenants who greeted him. A great man—the man in whose hands lay the destinies of four huge dreadnaughts! Not for worlds would Jimmy press forward—he a mere middy, an Academy nobody! The steerage mess had received this honor because they all had done splendidly with the five-inch secondary battery commanded by them, and the Admiral had been particularly pleased with their work. Jimmy's own gun had done well too, but to be among those to take the Admiral's hand would be the act of a forward and precocious youngster indeed, he felt. Jimmy hung back, standing shyly by his seat, his blue eyes dropped on the card at his plate.

Suddenly he became aware that the Admiral was looking at him. The old gentleman had come around the table and was about to seat himself. His eye had caught tall and handsome Jimmy opposite, and a smile and half a nod was already on his face as the midshipman looked up. It was Jimmy's great chance. To have met the Admiral with a frank smile and made a bow was all that was necessary.

Instead a sort of nervous shock went through Jimmy like electricity. His eyes dropped bashfully to his plate. The next instant he was hating himself and sitting down as inconspicuously as possible. His golden moment had gone! He caught a slight frown of displeasure replacing the smile on the Admiral's face, for he had failed to return the bow. The head of the fleet had seated himself and was talking benignly with a nervous ensign at his side, but not once again did he look at Jimmy.

THE dinner went on. Jimmy's chagrin hardly allowed him to reply intelligently to the few remarks addressed to him by Captain Crandall. What would his mother, and the proud South Carolina Harrods, say to this performance? What would his uncles, executives of dreadnaughts and captains of cruisers, think? It had all been a sense of duty, well and correctly carried out, that had guided Jimmy so far on this practice cruise. But more, a sense of fluency and ease of deportment on these social functions were highly necessary too! This affair was far more important to him than it would seem to a landsman. The Admiral was sure to ask questions concerning this and that youngster who had impressed him during this dinner—get their names and identities in his mind, so that whenever an order for preferment came up to him, he would remember the youngster and approve. Jimmy felt that just this little incident, where he had failed, would be remembered instead, and would weigh against him when two came up for selection—himself and the bullying Buck Thompson, for instance. Throughout the meal it made him miserable, and he said little save a few abortive murmurs in answer to some chance remark flung his way by the Captain. How different, this, than

the way the affair *ought* to have gone off —with a South Carolina Navy Harrod!

At length it was over. The Admiral arose, paid his respects and departed. The steerage mess drew a huge sigh of relief. They were all tremendously excited and critical, for it had been a momentous occasion, and on the whole, had gone off well. As they were to tow the target raft for the *Massachusetts'* battle-practice on the morrow, Jimmy sought out Lieutenant Whitten and timidly asked for the repair-boat.

"I was on leave at the Norfolk yard when they were building one, sir," he urged. "Had a big chance to get the construction details down fine. Wish you'd let the Exec' know, if he hasn't already picked some one."

Whitten shook his head doubtfully. He too had noted that little incident between Jimmy and the Admiral, the youth was sure. "I don't know about that, youngster," he demurred. "Of course we have to put you cadets through the mill, but unless the commander says so, I rather think one of the ensigns will get that repair-boat. I'll bear your experience in mind, however. Mighty few of the mess have even seen a target-raft at close range."

Jimmy went off to his quarters to pass a sleepless night—kicking himself, mostly for being such an almost fabulous ass when his big chance to become known to the Admiral had come—and gone! Nice stunt for a Navy Harrod to do!

NEXT morning a whole shipload of umpires and observers went over on the *Massachusetts* to check up her practice. The *Montana* was nearly stripped of officers, but those that were left had plenty to do. Aft behind the Number Four Turret, the first lieutenant was superintending a gang of bluejackets heaving aboard the great hawser which towed the raft. A heavy sea was on, the navy tug rolling and pitching on the great swells, while the raft itself rose and fell smothered with foam. Jimmy was busy helping the junior deck-officer with the crew of the repair-boat, checking off the men, seeing that each had his life-preserver on, food and stores on board, tools and rope. Occasionally he would glance back to where the long raft rolled, a deep and narrow craft a hundred and forty feet long, with five masts bearing the huge gray targets strung between them. Whoever had the repair-boat that day would have his work cut out for him! After each string of shots from the *Massachusetts*, the repair-boat would dart out from behind the protection of the *Montana*, take down the target and replace it with a fresh one. Jimmy hoped it would be he. A wet and freezing job, that, with the great white seas breaking all over the raft, but it would be a fine chance for gritty duty!

At length the men were mustered, and one by one went down into the boat. Lieutenant Whitten came running up with papers in his hand. "Thompson—where's Thompson?" he barked. "You get the boat today, youngster!" he smiled. "Mind you don't drown yourself! —Harrod, you're on the rake-party."

Jimmy's heart sank as Thompson ran, all smiles, to hustle on a life-preserver and join his men. His job on the rake-party would be interesting but prosaic—nothing but just plain duty. The "rake" was a large wooden contrivance mounted on the after turret. An ensign usually operated it, sighting over the teeth of the rake, each one of which measured a hundred yards of the fall of the shell-spouts around the target raft. His part would probably be to sit there with a pair of telephone receivers over his ears and transmit the fall of shots by wireless telephone over to the gunners on the *Massachusetts*.

However, he went cheerfully over to the after turret to report to Ensign Borden in charge of the rake. It was all in the day's duty—even if he knew that Thompson knew nothing whatever about target-rafts! Good try-out for *him*, anyway!

AFTER a time the *Montana* got up speed. The immense hawser sagged and straightened out; the raft surged and wallowed ahead, smoking spray in the seas, water tumbling off her in cascades with every pitch. Her masts rolled wildly; the string of targets flapped like huge sails.

Presently the *Massachusetts* came over the horizon, creeping up on her prey. Like some huge gray castle she seemed, her triple guns trained threateningly on the wretched target. It was reasonably safe, up there on the after turret. Once in a while the twist of a right-hand shell would send it roaring over the rake, on the ricochet from a short shot, but that seldom happened, for it represented very wild shooting. The *Massachusetts* was the crack ship of the division, and Jimmy felt that they were all keyed up over there, for they were out for a record.

Nearer and nearer she came. It was disconcerting to see the staring muzzles of four tiers of fourteen-inch guns apparently trained directly on you, for the five hundred yards astern of the raft made little difference in the train at five thousand yards. Slowly a red powder flag crept up to the yardarm on her forward basket mask. "There goes officers' call!" whispered Jimmy to himself, sighting across the arm of the rake toward the *Massachusetts.*

A plume of white smoke from the single thick funnel.

"Whistle! Now they commence firing! Stand by, there, rake-party!" bellowed the ensign.

An enormous belch of brown smoke broke from the forward turret of the *Massachusetts.* A whirl of orange flame enveloped it. Jimmy's eyes swept the intervening area of sea and picked up the three fourteen inch shells in mid-air, humming low over the sea like angry bees. The target shivered. Three high shell-spouts broke around the raft; then *ong-ong-ong-ong!* roared the shells, ricocheting on out to the far horizon, where again three shell-spouts rose. Finally came the dull *Brraanngg!* of the belated report.

"Three hits! Spot, up one hundred, one-fifty and seventy-five!" called out the ensign, spotting the fall of shot over the rake-teeth.

"Spot, up one hundred, one fifty and seventy-five!" repeated Jimmy carefully into his telephone.

"Aye, aye, sir!" came the voice of the electrician on the *Massachusetts,* repeating the spot again, word for word. Through the same receivers Jimmy could hear the aviators reporting the spot from the balloon floating high above the *Montana.*

Again came the burst of smoke from the *Massachusetts'* Number One Turret. This time the spouts broke all around the target, for her gunners had lowered according to the spot.

"Down seventy-five, up fifty, up seventy-five—two hits!" announced the ensign. "They're going to smear us, Jimmy!"

Jimmy nodded and telephoned the spot. It looked that way, as their rival was now shooting. You had to be dead *on,* to beat these birds!

THE target rose and fell in long surges, spewing white cascades of water from all over her platform. The next burst would finish Number One's string. It came a minute later, for she had only three minutes to do it all in. This time the shells arrived just as the raft had topped the rise of a huge comber. Jimmy flinched instinctively as his eyes told him they would go low, very low—probably hit the raft. The lower edge of the target shivered, and at the same instant one of the fourteen-inch shells struck the raft-platform planks edge on. Immediately a shower of splinters whirled out over the waves. Under Number One target the whole platform was gone, nothing but the stumps of the trestle appearing above the next sea. One plank stuck out at a crazy angle, and a thin line down to it showed that a target halliard was cleated out there.

"Fat business for poor young Thompson!" grinned the ensign, peering at it through his glasses. "He'll have a purple time of it taking down that target, I'll say!"

Jimmy grunted sympathetically and borrowed the glasses after reporting the spot. Here was where his knowledge of the construction of that raft would count. It looked hopeless—a wild and watery job climbing that plank, buffeting across the bare deck of the raft through those stumps! He wished again that he had had that job instead of the pestiferous Buck!

THE *Massachusetts* ran down her powder-flag and turned for her run back to the horizon for Number Two's string. At once the repair-boat shot out from her refuge behind the *Montana* to take down that target. The seas were a smother of white as she dipped and rose over them. A few heads were suspiciously bent over her gunwales—some poor devils of gobs whose stomachs were giving up all their inside information.

The repair-boat had puttered over to the raft and hung around it. To come alongside in those seas would be to invite a crash, but one lone figure standing up in her bows, bulging with the cork squares of the life preserver about his waist, showed that they were about to attempt boarding her. Presently he jumped for the raft and hung clinging to a pole. The seas rushed at him and combed him with freezing water as he slowly made his way forward, rushing from mast to mast between seas. Jimmy watched him through the glasses, getting more and more excited all the time. It was *not* Buck Thompson, for his white officer's cap still showed in the stern sheets

of the repair-boat. Some hardy boatswain's mate, evidently. Why didn't Buck do it himself, snorted Jimmy to himself. Sent a man in his place on dangerous duty!

The sailor paused at the break. He looked up at the halliard cleated to the end of that wabbly plank, which dipped over the seas far out. To reach even the lower end of it, he would have to fight his way across the narrow and slippery deck through the stumps of the platform trestle. A nervy job, but—

THEN a groan went up from both Jimmy and the ensign as they watched the man crawl back to the rear again.

"Gee—that's the limit!" growled the ensign. "He's passed it up! Hope that damned middy has the proper nerve—we ought to have sent a *man,*" he sniffed disgustedly.

Jimmy's ire rose. Annapolis was at stake here! The youngsters just *had* to make good, on their honor!

"I'll go if he don't, sir—*please* get them to let me!" he begged.

"Nothing doing, kid!" retorted the ensign. "Think of all our boys over on the *Massachusetts* umpiring, and the *Arizona's* observing, to say nothing of their own people all keyed up for the big day of all the year! The commander'll send a *man,* next trip. We can't abandon battle-practice just for a broken raft platform."

Jimmy could hardly believe his eyes, for the sailor was now jumping back to the repair-boat and Buck Thompson was standing up talking to him, but so far had not made a move to go aboard himself. Through the glasses he saw them all looking at the raft and shaking their heads. It was unbelievable that they were going to give up!

"Oh, please, sir—please!" he implored the ensign. "Old Crabtown would never forgive us if word of this got back. I know these rafts—helped build one down in Norfolk. Wont you give us one more chance?" he begged.

The ensign relented. "Seems a shame, don't it! We're bound to put you middies through the mill. It wont take long to try you out before the *Massachusetts* gets back. Sure you can do it, now?" he warned.

"Yes sir," said Jimmy, and his eyes spoke unmeasured wells of gratitude.

"I'll put in a word for you! Get a C. P. O. to relieve you at the rake if the commander consents. This poor fish is coming back now—scared!" he snorted, gazing angrily at the returning repair-boat.

An impatient group was awaiting Buck Thompson at the gangway as he came up the ladder, glistening with salt water and shaking his head. The Admiral was there, and Captain Crandall. The Exec' was barking angrily and looking around for some one to send, but most of the senior lieutenants were already over on the *Massachusetts* in the umpire party.

Buck Thompson went below in disgrace. Jimmy saw his own ensign joining the group. His hand went up in salute, and then he began speaking to the commander, who listened, his face seamed with angry impatience, for the *Massachusetts* was already swinging back for her second string. Then he beckoned to Jimmy, and the youth came running as glad surges of joy welled up in his breast. They were going to try him!

He stood at salute as the Admiral bent his stern brows on him. "Youngster, I give you five minutes to get down that target!" his heavy bass voice was growling. "Ensign Borden tells me you know something about our rafts. For the sake of the old Academy, I am giving you the chance—can you *do* it?"

"Yes sir," said Jimmy simply, but there was that in his eyes that told the Admiral he would. The Commander grunted:

"Borden, I'll have to send you, if he don't. I can't well spare you from the rake, but we have no one left who is not on duty."

Then he turned on Jimmy, and his eyes searched him—in that way that men have. What he saw there seemed to reassure him.

"Very good, sir—I'll vouch for him!" he said to the Admiral. The latter nodded. Jimmy took the hint and was off like a flash for the repair-boat. She was bobbing up and down in great surges near the gangway platform, but he stepped aboard lightly on the rise and went aft. They were all looking at him, up there, and some already doubting, he felt; but it was his big chance to run with the ball.

"Shove off—look alive, there!" shouted the officer of the deck down at him.

JIMMY gave the order, and his motor started. Once out from the lee of the *Montana,* the seas smote him like a lash. It seemed more like five miles than five hundred yards out to where his enemy, the

target-raft, leered at him covered with smoking foam. And a plume of black high over the horizon told him that the *Massachusetts* was steaming on the range again.

As they approached, the tall masts of the raft swung wildly over them. The great, long, narrow boat was all awash, her heavy pine beams slippery and wet where they rose above the waters. Jimmy turned over his boat to a C. P. O., gave a last hitch to his life-preserver string and went up in the bow. Nearer and nearer she edged in, boat and raft rising and falling like a huge see-saw. At just the right instant he leaped across the chasm between them and grabbed for a mast. A hungry sea rushed at him. Jimmy clung fast and shivered as the icy water spewed all over him, and he could feel it soaking through to his skin. Watching his chance, he rushed giddily along the platform to the next mast. A long roller came sweeping along, strumming fiercely around his knees. When it was gone, he rushed again and got past two more masts. Right ahead rose Numbers Two and One. Between them was an empty gap filled with wet trestle-stumps. That shell had carried away everything save the last plank, which hung by a couple of spikes to the trestle-brace, and its outer end was held up by a taut and strumming halliard, cleated fast out there at the upper end.

As Jimmy saw it, this thing was just a matter of crawling from stump to stump, hanging fast, and holding your breath as the seas swept over. He plunged in at the next rise and floundered through, his shoes slipping out from under him on the slimy deck. A sea wallowed over. Jimmy flung both arms around a stump and let it wallow. It was cold as Greenland, and the rush of it strung him out flat. Green sea-water filled his eyes as he held his breath. Then it was gone, and he rose to stagger on.

The third rise saw him clawing fiercely at the plank end. Up it he shinnied, glad to be out of the wet, even if the cold wind went through him now like a knife. Up and up he climbed, and at last reached the halliard. The men below cheered as he began unbending the halliard, but Jimmy glanced out to where the *Massachusetts* was coming on the range, her threatening guns bearing dead on him. He would be in time!

"All gone!" he yelled. Instantly the plank whipped down from under him. Jimmy clung to the halliard as he felt himself rising, while the huge spar across the top of the target began to dip down. He dropped down the rope hand over hand to save himself from being skied. Then he watched the crazy swing of it for a chance to fly across that dangerous gap. His body soared around, now out over the waves, now flinging in toward the mast, but at the next rise it swung over astern and Jimmy landed on the platform and at once attacked the other halliard.

"That's well!" he bellowed. "Roll her in, boys!"

Over the welling seas the ragged gray square of the target floated, while the crew rolled it rapidly up like some huge curtain-pole. The raft-tender tug had now come out to get it. Jimmy heard a hoarse bellow of congratulation from the whistle of the *Montana*, but hardly realized it was for him, so busy was he getting the target in shape to tow, and conning the boat alongside so as to take him off.

"Now, then, beat it, boys—the *Massachusetts* is getting ready to fire on Number Two," he ordered, taking the helm again.

OVER to the tub they towed the target, where eager sailors hauled her aboard. Then both hurried for the protection of the *Montana*. Jimmy ran his motor-sailer alongside and hurried up the gangway.

"Duty complete, sir," he reported to the officer of the deck. Some one nudged him in the ribs. "The Admiral is speaking to you, Jimmy!" prompted the Exec' in his ear.

Jimmy whirled about and stood at salute, scarce daring to raise his eyes to the tall man who confronted him.

"Where are you going, youngster?" smiled the Admiral down at him—and it was a very different expression from that frown of the evening before!

"Reporting back to the rake-party, sir," replied Jimmy.

"You have no orders to do so," grinned the Admiral. "I think you'd better keep the repair-boat today—the *Massachusetts* may tear up something else before she gets through!" he chortled.

"Yes sir," said Jimmy very respectfully, but as he leaped down into the repair-boat again, he could have shouted for joy.

Easy Street Experts

"The Condors' Hoard" describes a specially thrilling exploit of two notably gifted artists in polite rascality.

By Bertram Atkey

"NO, no, Chevalier," said the Honorable John Brass indulgently to the fat gentleman to whom, somewhere in the neighborhood of the last green on the Testmouth-on-Sea links, he was giving a little friendly golf advice and instruction. "No, you want to *hit* at the little mound—not pat it. There's a lot of infernal nonsense talked about this pressing. And it gets a lot of men scared stiff. *Hit* the ball—lay into it. Keep your eye on it, certainly—but hit the little devil. This half-swinging's all very well in its way, but—well, look here. Let out at it—like this."

The club hummed in the air like a well-handled battle-ax as the Honorable John inexorably cut the head of a dandelion into a shapeless fleck of vegetable pulp.

"See, Chevalier?" he said. "Like that. You want to put a bit of beef into it, you know. Distance—that's what you're after, distance—mileage, in fact. Time 'em, of course—must time 'em properly. Also keep your eye on the ball. And *hit*. Don't *fan* the ball—it aint hot, and it aint a lady. Hey, boy—just tee up a ball here. I'll show you what I mean, Chevalier."

The fat gentleman with the Tartar-type face which is more common in Russia than in Testmouth watched the Honorable John with the usual respect of a golfing beginner for an expert (even though self-styled) as he addressed the ball which a caddie had promptly teed up.

"A nice, easy swing," said the Honorable John, "easy—but with some nourishment in it, mind. None of your pat-a-cake stuff. Eye on the ball—and head down. Stand back, boy. Now, I'm going for distance. Watch, now."

He swung at the ball, like a man cutting down a thick oak tree against time. It may not be elegant, but it is very true, to say that he grunted furiously as he lashed out at the little white dot sitting so demurely on its mound, and to add that he put some "nourishment" into the shot would be but a feeble description of the sheer brute force with which he flailed and thrashed the lumpy-headed club through the atmosphere.

The ball darted, with a faint, whistling wail from the tee, and curled and curled and curled in a vast, sickening curve away to the right. The wind took it and pushed

it round and round so that it fell finally fifty yards off the golf course, beyond the road, into the chicken-run of a hard-worked ex-officer who kept a poultry farm consisting of twenty dejected hens, a couple of languid roosters and a bag of excellent golf-clubs within easy reach of the links.

The Honorable John's friend and partner, Colonel Clumber, who was standing by, burst into a roar of unfeeling laughter, the caddie half grinned, looked scared, and turned his back; and even the fat beginner whom the partners called "Chevalier," looked a little bemazed.

"My foot slipped," lied the Honorable John calmly, shamelessly and without effort. "If my foot hadn't slipped, that would have been notoriously one of the longest balls ever hit on this course."

He lifted an eyelid menacingly at the hearty guffaw of his partner, and handed the club to the caddie.

"Give 'em a good clean, boy, ready for the afternoon," he ordered. "And now, Chevalier, what about some lunch? Then I'll see if I can't play your best ball this afternoon—giving you four strokes."

"If you can give the Chevalier's and my best ball four strokes," said the Colonel swiftly and defiantly, "there's five pounds reward from each of us waiting for you. And if you can't, there's ten coming to us. Man, you're throwing your money away."

The Tartar-visaged gentleman nodded.

"We shall do our best quality play to win his money away from him, no?" he stated. "Me, I shall put plenty beef to it and hit far balls—for five pounds again, is it not? Very good, yes. Let us go to lunch, then. Me, I learn more of this remarkable game each day I go to it. By practice and listening at your instruction, *mon ami!* Not at all, certainly. When my friend Araseff comes to settle in England, I shall knock his head at golf-playing, already. Also his money, no! Ha-ha! In one week I shall be twenty-four handicap and that will be enough yet to defeat the good Araseff. Come, then—let us have lunch, yes?"

So the three went off to the motor which was waiting to take them back to the house of the gentleman whose game the Honorable John had been endeavoring to improve.

THE Chevalier D'Abrinoff was not an old friend of those cheerful though somewhat unscrupulous adventurers, the Honorable John Brass and Colonel Clumber. Indeed, a week before, he had been profoundly ignorant of their existence. He had made their acquaintance upon the links, and seeming to possess much in common with them, he had rather fostered the intimacy which a week's battling over the course had begun.

The Chevalier was not, broadly speaking, an attractive man. True, he appeared to possess a very great deal of money, but he was lacking in personal charm, and he was destitute of magnetism. His English was difficult,—"scrambled" was the Honorable John's term for it,—and his ideas of sportsmanship were limited.

Ordinarily the partners would have taken no more interest in him than they took in the local representative of the Temperance League—but because, within a quarter of an hour of meeting him, the Honorable John had been visited by one of his famous "hunches" or convictions that good (financial variety) was coming to them through him, the Colonel had consented to associate himself with his partner's avowed intent to learn a little more of the Chevalier than it was possible to acquire without the trouble of cultivating an intimate acquaintanceship.

"IF you ask me," the Colonel had said when the Honorable John had first stated his intention of keeping a sharp "lamp" on the Chevalier, "if you want my opinion, you can have it. I think you're wasting your time, and mine too. Also his! This man is just one of those Continental sportsmen who have gathered together enough money over there to make it worth their while to find a decent country to salt it down in and live next to it. He's a harmless sort of retired business man who's either bought or lifted the title Chevalier; and if you think you're going to get anything worth having out of him, you're pawing at the wrong rabbit-hole."

But the Honorable John's views did not chime with those of his partner. He had smiled blandly upon receipt of the Colonel's opinion, nodded indulgently and reached for another cigar.

"Well, well, maybe you're right, Squire," he answered, "and maybe you're wrong—probably wrong. In fact, I have a healthy hunch that you're wrong. But that'll be all right. We shall see. It wont interfere with *my* holiday down here by the sea if I use my brains a bit. It's a holiday for my body, but my brains don't need any

rest. I'll do the fine work—if any is required—and you can just enjoy yourself."

Upon these terms they had cultivated the Chevalier, and within a week they had arrived at a stage of intimacy which, said the Honorable John, bade fair to produce results.

DRESSED by his partner to hazard an opinion upon the results he anticipated, the Honorable John replied with unabated confidence but very little information.

"It's a bit early to expect a lot of detail, Squire," he said, good-humoredly, pouring himself another glass of their extremely rare pre-war liqueur brandy, "but several points about the Chevalier and his general style have struck me. In fact, I'm giving them my consideration, and though I don't as a rule hold with forming plans prematurely, I don't know that I've got any objection to teaching you my methods."

He cocked a wise old eye at his partner, who had emitted a faint growl of disgust.

"You don't want to feel hurt at my saying that, you know, Squire—any more than you'd feel hurt if I had curly golden hair with one of these matinée-idol waves in it. It's natural for me to see significance in little things, details, that you wouldn't notice in a month—just as it would be natural for me to have curly golden hair if—well, if I had it, that is."

"Only you haven't got it," said the Colonel, running a greenish eye over his partner's practically hairless and luncheon-flushed dome. "Go on, then—what have you noticed about the Chevalier, anyway?"

"I'll explain," said the Honorable John Brass tranquilly, and proceeded to do so.

"First of all, we've only got the Chevalier's word that his name's D'Abrinoff and that he's the Chevalier of it—whatever or wherever D'Abrinoff is. I sort of gathered that it's in Russia, and he certainly has a Russian kind of face. He's settled here in that big house, Cliffcrest, for life, and I happen to know he's wanting to buy that bigger house called Test Place for this pal of his, Araseff, who is coming from Russia before long—also to settle down here. (By the way, I've got a two-months option on Test House. The man I played against in the medal round for the Visitors Cup was the owner. So if this Araseff likes the place, we shall switch a thousand down our siding, anyway.)

"Well, there it is. Here's a man—a brace of 'em—who must have carted a great big bale of good money out of Russia; you'll agree with that, I suppose. But as far as I can see, nobody has any money in Russia—except those that don't deserve it. All right! We'll put down D'Abrinoff's money as some he's got by doubtful means—money, in fact, that we're more or less entitled to get from him. The same applies to his forthcoming pal Araseff."

"Well, how are you going to get it, huh?" demanded the Colonel. "You want to get rid of any idea that because he talks that botched-up English and plays golf like a half-armed buffalo, he's easy."

"No." The Honorable John shook his head. "He isn't easy. I'll own that I should hate to be at his mercy. I haven't overlooked that. Just how I'm going to arrange about transferring some of that Rusisan loot from him to us I haven't decided. But there's no hurry. It's there—when we get ready to take it."

"How d'you know it's there?" scoffed the Colonel. "It's more probably underground in the vaults of some London bank."

The Honorable John smiled blandly.

"Well, no—not exactly," he disagreed. "You see, there's a strong-room at Cliffcrest. The house used to belong to Carr, the big money-lender."

"How do you know that?"

"Sing happens to have made friends in some Chinese sort of fashion with the Chevalier's servant—who looks to me to be a sort of Mongolian cross between an Asiatic Russian and a Chinaman. Anyway, they can talk to each other in some sort of language that sounds like putting a bit of cold veal through a rusty mincing machine. Sing says it's the way they talk in Chinese Turkestan—wherever that is, if anywhere. This Kut-Su it was who told Sing about the strong-room. And Sing, like a good lad, got Kut going on the opium or chloroform or chlorine or whatever these chaps take as a little stimulant, until he gleaned that the Chinaman took a great interest in the strong-room—had a lot of stuff of some sort in it, in fact."

"What stuff?" demanded the Colonel, suddenly enlivened.

"Hah, I thought that would twang your heartstrings," smiled John. "I suppose it's money or jewelry—or anyway, valuable stuff, if he keeps it in a strong-room."

"Did Sing get anything else?"

The Honorable John nodded.

"D'Abrinoff sleeps with an automatic on the table by his bed," he announced.

The Colonel looked gloomy.

"Anything else?"

"And the girl, Sonya, who seems to be his ward, is in love, Sing says, with a young, good-looking guy stopping at Littlesey just along the coast. Some young foreigner—French, Sing thinks. The girl meets him most afternoons when the Chevalier is on the links learning how to win his forthcoming pal's money."

"Does the Chevalier know?"

"No. He tells me his idea is to marry Sonya to Araseff when he arrives. . . . . Well, that's about all," concluded the Honorable John, rising. "Leave it to me. Turn that strong-room over in your mind now and then." He rang the bell and commanded Sing to get out the car to drive them to the links a quarter of a mile away where they were due to meet the Chevalier.

IT was perhaps three days later when the Honorable John suffered a slight accident. True, it was nothing more serious than a moderately sprained shoulder-blade, acquired up the golf-links during a rather hopeless effort to give the Chevalier's and his partner's best ball two strokes for a ten-pound note. It had proved to be an off-day for the Honorable John, who most disconcertingly had found himself four down, with five to play, at the fourteenth hole. He had already lost his temper, and in order to avoid losing the match also he had endeavored to put into his drive rather more "beef" than his anatomy could conveniently spare for the purpose. He had missed the ball, dug a hole in the tee, broken his driver, sprained his shoulder-blade, and narrowly escaped a ricked ankle and a stiff neck. When he became coherent again, he resigned the match, paid his losses and gave up golf for the rest of the week.

So it befell that he chanced one morning to find himself, in the course of a gentle, appetite-stimulating stroll through the town, gazing rather idly into the windows of a photographer's shop, running his eye over the ladies portrayed therein, speculating pleasantly which of those exhibited were "his style" and which were not.

His eyes fell upon the photograph of a good-looking youth in flannels, and his gaze suddenly became fixed.

He knew the flanneled one, for it was none other than Mr. Raoul Avelin, the youth whom Sonya, the beautiful ward of the Chevalier D'Abrinoff, was so prone to meet along the beach midway between Littlesey and Testmouth—without her guardian's knowledge or permission.

But it was not his recognition of the lad which caused the Honorable John's heavy brows to amalgamate themselves into a frown. It was an idea that had occurred to him. He slanted his head and screwed up his eyes, studying the photograph.

"Now, is that just my fancy—or is it *so?*" he asked himself, rather vaguely; and presumably in order to get a better or a different view of the portrait, he stepped back abruptly—onto the entire foot of a baggily clad gentleman wearing a futurist tie and an angler's hat who was gazing rather moonily down the street at the weather. Clearly an artist, and judging from the friendly, though rather wan, smile with which he had rescued his foot, a man of a good-natured disposition.

The Honorable John apologized, attributing the mishap to his interest in the photograph.

"I'm sorry, Squire," said the old rascal. "I hope I haven't crushed your foot—lucky I had these tennis-shoes on. Didn't know you were so near. Very careless of me—but I was so interested in wondering who that young chap"—he indicated Mr. Avelin's portrait—"would look like if he had a beard, that I rather lost myself."

He frowned at the picture.

INTERESTED by the somewhat novel reason for his absence of mind given by the Honorable John, the artist released his double-handed grip on his foot and peered at the portrait.

"He reminds me of some one, that lad—somebody I've seen somewhere with a beard. Is he familiar to you, old man?" inquired John.

The artist moved his head about, getting various angles of view, then drew out a sketch-pad and a pencil, and jabbed the pencil-point swiftly but intricately over the pad.

The Honorable John peered over his shoulder.

"Well, you're certainly a bird with the pencil, friend," he admitted. "That's the lad, right enough."

"I will now give him a beard—shall it be a big one, or a spade one, or an imperial or torpedo or a forked one?" He laughed.

"Give him an ordinary pointed one—spade, hey? Make it a spade."

The artist obliged, looked surprised, then turned to the Honorable John.

"Now, do you know who he reminds you of?" he asked smiling.

The Honorable John's eyes glowed as he nodded.

"Well—you can't miss it very well, can you? I've never seen anybody who looked more like the late Czar of Russia—made twenty years younger—than that lad you've drawn there. Queer, that, hey? I knew I'd seen the face before."

The artist good-naturedly tore off the sheet.

"If you're interested, perhaps you'd care to accept the little rough sketch!" he said.

The Honorable John did care, accepted it with thanks, and the artist limped away.

"If that lad Avelin isn't a blood relation to the Romanoffs," he mused as he went homeward, "you call me no judge of a face."

He was so deeply lost in thought that his partner had to speak quite sharply to him about getting on with the extremely good lunch which Sing had prepared for them.

THAT evening the partners were dining with the Chevalier D'Abrinoff.

Like his guests, the Chevalier was a man who appeared to devote at least fifty per cent of his brains to the problem of good food and plenty of it; and this evening he had rather extended himself in the matter of uniquely nourishing his guests—and himself. His ward Sonya, however, seemed to find it dull work. Indeed, she hardly troubled to disguise her opinion that she did not find the conversation of the three gentlemen, which rarely drifted from the merits or demerits of the many dishes, either wildly exhilarating or tensely interesting. Throughout the meal she was so aloof from and out of touch with the general trend of the conversation—which was indeed rather akin to the sort of conversation one might have expected from a trio of eighteen handicap chefs—that it was entirely without regret, and indeed with rather an air of relief, that her Tartar-visaged guardian and his guests saw her leave the table.

"She is yet too young to possess any soul for her necessary food, h'm," explained the Chevalier. "She is of a romantic nature yet—and interests herself nothing in the eating of her food and drinking her wine." He sighed. "Youth—romance! Good things both, maybe, certainly. But for me—for us all, h'm?—we are not of an age for romance. Come, then, we will now drink wine, steadily. I—have some good wine. You shall see."

They did so.

The Chevalier had spoken no more than the stark truth when he had claimed to possess some good wine. It was more than good—it was wonderful, priceless, unique.

The partners—both judges of wine—were amazed. And their amazement was not due wholly to the unexpected quality of the wine; it was inspired partly by their host's method of dealing with it. He did not drink it in the manner of the epicure or even that of the half-trained wine-drinker. Not at all! He lapped it up as a haymaker laps cider or a navvy drinks free beer—to quote the subsequent inelegant comment of the disgusted Honorable John.

Nor did the Chevalier confine his lapping to any one wine. He distributed his efforts over many wines and many vintages—each fit for a king's cellar. As the feeble-minded butterfly or the businesslike bee flits from flower to flower taking a sip from each, so the Chevalier flitted from wine to wine—though he took more than a sip from every bottle.

It annoyed the partners excessively that just as they seemed quietly settled down to an amazingly fine port, the Chevalier should swiftly finish the bottle and cause to be produced—with extreme hospitality but shockingly bad judgment—some perfectly marvelous Madeira, which, in its turn, he would presently abandon for some startling Burgundy—the Burgundy presently yielding in its turn to Tokay!

It was a very remarkable and rather bewildering experience for the partners. Had the quality of the wines—all of them—been less superb than it was, the whole affair would have been very offensive to them. But as the Honorable John afterwards said: "How can you be annoyed with a man who knocks you off a wine fit for a prince in order to start you on one fit for a king, and then suddenly knocks you off that and insists on your tackling a wine fit for a queen! What can you do about it?" What indeed?

It was abundantly evident that though he indubitably possessed a magnificent cellar, the Chevalier had no more idea of

how to treat it than a beast of the field. It was a very extreme case of casting pearls before swine, or to be more precise, of casting nectar before a powerful but soulless suction-plant. No man who had ransacked the world for such vintages would have treated it with such brutality. That at least was certain—and it added another and a difficult section to the jigsaw puzzle as to who, and what, the Chevalier was, where he came from and why, and what he had and where he got it—and was it transferable?

PAINED, puzzled and rather annoyed, the Honorable John presently rose from the mahogany and excused himself for a few moments. He was feeling a little faint, he said, and with the Chevalier's acquiescence, he would take a ten-minute turn in the garden with a cigar. A breath of fresh sea-air would abolish that touch of faintness.

The Chevalier, flushed and winy, agreed with a faint air of surprised pity for what he evidently regarded as his guest's limited capacity.

"But you will return quickly and drink a glass wine, yes?"

He spoke as though they had not already surrounded innumerable glasses wine. The Honorable John smiled and promised, leaving the dour Colonel grimly to measure himself against the Russian—no light task, but one which the Colonel was determined to see through.

The Honorable John was well satisfied, for his sudden hunger for a breath of sea-air had been inspired not by faintness but by a glimpse through the half-open French window of the pale flicker of a light dress down the garden. Of the three men, he was the only one sitting at such an angle that the moonlit garden was partly visible to him. He was interested in the relations between the girl and her guardian, for he had surprised more than once a look on the girl's face which expressed feelings for the Chevalier which resembled hatred and disgust more nearly than any other emotion.

He took a cigar (which he did not light) and disappeared into the garden, closing the French window behind him.

For a moment he stood bareheaded in the cool salt breeze that flowed gently in from the sea. Far to his right and below him, a band was playing on a promenade ablaze with light, and a chain of glowing electric lamps, like a festoon of yellowish stars, marked the pier, crowded with people. But up here on the cliff it was dark and silent, seeming oddly remote from the life and light of the place where the holiday folk sought their pleasure.

The Honorable John nodded softly to himself and strolled quietly across the lawn, down a flight of terrace-steps, across another lawn, passed through a strip of shrubbery—very silently—and so discovered a little summerhouse. From inside the summerhouse came the sound of a woman's voice. She was speaking softly, but evidently she was angry, for her voice was rising with every word.

The Honorable John looked, hesitated, shrugged his shoulders; and moving as silently as a stalking tiger, he went close up to the summerhouse window, listening.

THE girl Sonya was speaking in Russian. The Honorable John's lips compressed. He was no more familiar with the Russian tongue than that in use on the planet Venus. But his frown disappeared as a man spoke in the summerhouse:

"Use English, beloved; Kut-Su does not understand English as well as Russian."

It was a pleasant voice, almost entirely free from accent; and the Honorable John judged it belonged to the young man Raoul Avelin, who, with a beard, would have looked like a Romanoff.

"I do as you say, dear Michael," replied the girl softly. "But they sit at their wine—their stolen wine—*he* and the two fat men who have become his friends, and the serpent Kut-Su entertains that silent Chinaman in their own place. My little maid, whom I can trust, watches those two yellow China barbarians even as I sit here. Listen well, little Michael, to me. That other, the tiger-wolf Araseff, comes within a few days now—and *he* says that I am to be Araseff's wife."

The Honorable John, close against the wooden wall of the summerhouse, heard a low, menacing sound rasp across the pleasant voice of the girl Sonya, as it might have been a muffled curse upon the man called Araseff.

But evidently she did not fear the menace of that exclamation, for she laughed softly.

"Ah, dearest one, that is impossible—that I should be wife to that unspeakable one. The sea is clean and at hand; if it were necessary, I would lie close and quiet

and at peace in the embrace of the good sea rather than suffer one touch of that man's hand. I—no, we—we two, little Michael—shall be gone before the red shadow of Araseff crosses the threshold of that house. Rest content to know that. I know that you are so brave, so impetuous, so courageous, dear heart, that you would be willing to go now with me, even as I am,—look, in fragile slippers, in this little dress!—penniless both, to face the world. But I will not have it so, perhaps in the future to see you subjected to the indignities of the poverty-stricken!" Her sweet voice rose. "You, you, who alone of all your house have been spared by the mercy of God from those ravening wolves that have devastated and despoiled and destroyed Russia, blotted out all it had of sweetness, pity, love and hope—you, last noble of a house of nobles—stripped of all save your life alone, by these vultures, these eaters of human hearts—you, Michael, who have served in the Czar's own bodyguard, have been decorated by his own hands—I say I will *never* submit to see you subject to the humiliations that the poor must face daily.

"Dear heart, you have suffered enough indignity for a whole lifetime. And I could not endure to live by your side and watch you struggle at absurd and futile tasks for which you have not been trained, to be at the command of the ignorant and base-born. Pride, you whisper, my beloved—ah, yes, pride, pride! So be it! These are the days when we hear strange and startling tales of equality. But I have seen the herd at close quarters, even as you, and I despise them. Once I pitied them; now I take shelter behind my pride, and I will die before I come again to close quarters with them. I speak for you too. We will die together before we mingle again with the low-born, Michael. I care not. Remember Ekaterinburg!"

The Honorable John fought down a vague impulse to applaud the sentiments of the girl, for he too had not forgotten that brutal tragedy of the last days of the Czar, his wife and children.

THE girl went on again, more quietly.

"I will not have it that you ever seek tasks in the market for men," she said flatly. "You are of the blood royal, and it is not fitting. Listen to me, little Michael: The man D'Abrinoff has in his strong-room much plunder. Soon Araseff arrives with more. Then they will divide—and deserting their lost cause in Russia, will settle here for their lives. These were the men who ordered and supervised the massacre of your house, and who accumulated all your treasures, your jewels, and those of many other noble houses also. Many of these jewels, much of the plunder, reposes in the strong-room—awaiting the division with the tiger-wolf that is even now en route to this place. I desire to take—for you, beloved—such jewels as are truly yours, no more than these—and to go with you away. The jewels shall provide for our freedom and our happiness. Give me, make me a plan, a little plan, then. I have thought and thought until my brain spins, but I am not trained—familiar with the sleights of the thief—to break into strong-rooms; and—my spirit begins to fail, Michael, to fail."

She ceased, and the Honorable John heard a sob.

HE passed quickly round to the front of the summerhouse. But he had to deal with a man who, for all his youth, had issued from a welter of treachery and murder and cruelty which had taught him much. The white dress swayed back clear of the man, who moved with extraordinary swiftness.

The moonlight shone with a dull, bluish gleam upon the barrel of an automatic leveled at the Honorable John before he could speak.

"What do you seek?" came the voice of the Russian, hard, metallic and cold.

"Oh, just a few words with you," said the Honorable John. "I'm a friend. Never mind about the battery. I—happened to overhear what this young lady said—er—quite by chance. And I think I can help you—about that strong-room!"

He spoke swiftly for a little, assured himself that they understood, and so went back to the battle with the bottles.

"That's a girl worth while," he mused as he went. "She certainly isn't ever going to shine as a socialist—but she's got the courage of her convictions, anyway. Well, well, right or wrong, I guess we'll be helping her—for her sake, for her Michael's sake, and in a way, for our own. . . . . Lord! To think I've taught that mad wolf golf. A royal and ancient game like golf, played by a man-eating Bolshevist like that!"

He pushed through the French window

to reinforce Colonel Clumber against the apparently copper-lined Chevalier. They were still engaged in conversation and conviviality, but the Honorable John perceived at a glance that the end was near, and that his partner had successfully maintained, as it were, the traditions of the partnership. At first glance the ex-peer looked as rigidly sober as the captain of a team of undertaker's mutes, whereas the self-styled Chevalier was far, very far, from being in that creditable condition.

Whether the Colonel had achieved this admirable and praiseworthy result by sheer force of will and capacity, or whether it resulted from the indiscriminate and senseless greed with which the Chevalier, from the beginning, had embarked upon the carouse, the Honorable John neither knew nor cared. He had a great deal to do that night, and a limited amount of time to do it in.

The Chevalier—or as the Honorable John now knew him to be, the Bolshevist who had betrayed even his own unspeakable cause—had no chance whatever. Starting level, and keeping level it might have been a tight match—in any case it was that, but the Colonel had broken the back of the task, and with the Honorable John, revived and determined, now taking up the running, the man D'Abrinoff had no more chance than a sweet apple in the hands of a healthy small boy.

Quickly, confidently, mercilessly, the Honorable John settled down to make the pace of the carouse one which would settle the Chevalier in the shortest possible space of time.

LESS than an hour had elapsed before the Chevalier was sound asleep on a big couch, and the partners, slightly flushed but otherwise apparently normal, sitting side by side at the table, awaiting a report from Sing, to whom the Colonel, on the pretext of getting a breath of fresh air, had conveyed the importance of rendering Kut-Su, the only one of the servants still up, harmless.

Under the Honorable John's big, muscular hand lay a bunch of keys. As they waited, he was telling his partner briefly what he had learned in the summerhouse.

"It's more or less what my hunch hinted at, Squire," he said softly. "That saturated hound on the couch was one of the Bolshevist bosses in Russia. But he and his pal Araseff, another of 'em, saw the end in sight, and collecting all the plunder they had accumulated, that blackguard over there cleared out and came to England. He brought the bulk of the plunder, and also the girl Sonya—whom he means to marry to Araseff, when he arrives with the rest of the loot. She also is the only survivor of a family of Russian aristocrats, and she is in love with another one—this chap who calls himself Avelin, who is the last of another family which was closely related to the royal family over there. Both Sonya's people and his have been killed and robbed—stripped—by D'Abrinoff and Araseff, though they fancy she doesn't know it. But the only reason the girl has pretended to yield to their plans is because she feels she's got to get back from them some of hers and Michael's—that's one of Avelin's real names—property. She's a remarkable girl, and she's got a lot of sense. Michael, who escaped from Russia somehow, is either a duke or baron or something, and she knows that if he has to start afresh as a plain hustler in this or some other country, and to earn his own living,—and hers,—they are going to have a very poor time of it. She's right, too. They're a couple of little aristocrats, and they've never been taught how to do anything worth paying for, and she knows it; and right or wrong, she's proud of it. I guess, after seeing some of the Bolshevistic brotherhood, she's right. She'd sooner die than take any more excursions among ordinary everyday folk; and right or wrong, good luck to her! She's got some pluck, if her social ideas are a bit on the lofty side. Well, I've agreed to get them back whatever share of their property is in the strong-room."

The Colonel nodded his agreement.

"And what we—"

The Honorable John broke off as a yellow-hued, hard-faced individual entered soundlessly—Sing, his Chinese valet, confidential private thug and all-round sword-bearer.

He grinned at his master.

"Kut-Su allee same sleepee, please," he said softly. "Him dopee—you seeing, master, allee same dluggee."

The Honorable John nodded.

"Good lad, Sing. Very well done! I'm very pleased with you. See about promoting you one of these days, very likely." He rose, the Chevalier's keys in his hand.

"Now, what about this strong-room? D'ye know where it is, hey?"

Sing nodded.

"Right, my lad. Lead us to it! And quietly, mind. Get a move on!"

The door closed softly as the three old campaigners disappeared—moving through the shadows of the big house with no more sound than three ghosts—dangerous ones.

They were back within twenty minutes. Only the Honorable John entered the room of slaughtered bottles, and he did not linger longer than was necessary to replace the Chevalier's keys in the pocket from which he had taken them, and to withdraw, smiling blandly, leaving the scoundrel on the couch to sleep surrounded by the innumerable evidences of the carouse which had sent him to sleep.

He had looted the cellars of princes—but the loot had achieved its own revenge.

TEN minutes later the partners, with Sing hovering in the background, were standing beside a table in their own house—a furnished place rented for their seaside sojourn. Facing them were the lady Sonya and her little Michael—a handsome couple, with the dawn of their coming happiness already clear to be seen upon their faces.

Upon the table between the four was piled that which the Brass-Clumber combination had retrieved from the strong-room of the Bolshevist traitor.

It was a goodly haul, consisting mainly of jewelry, wonderful jewelry. There were half a dozen ropes of pearls worth an enormous sum, and some amazing diamonds and emeralds. Two small crowns, several tiaras, a number of bracelets, and rings in profusion. From many of the pieces gems had been torn out of their setting, leaving unsightly gaps. In one of the crowns, for instance, there was only one big diamond left. Many of the things were twisted and bent; quite a number of the pearls were broken; and—even the hard-bitten partners thrilled at this—more than one of the articles had the unmistakable brown stain of dried blood upon them.

The Honorable John picked up a diamond tiara that was terribly twisted and stained.

"If that thing could speak, hey?" he said, very seriously. "What poor woman was killed by these Bolshevist hyenas for sake of that?"

Michael gently took the tiara from his big hands.

"By a curious coincidence," he said in a voice that vibrated strangely, "monsieur has selected for his example a jewel which belonged to—my mother."

His eyes blazed in his white face as he spoke. He stared at the heap upon the table that glittered with fierce hot jets of rainbow flame, and drew out a bracelet.

"In the year nineteen hundred and fourteen this was presented by the Grand Duchess Tatiana to my sister," he said again with an awful stony tranquillity. "On her twentieth birthday!"

Two hunting knives, with jeweled hilts, their steel blades inlaid with gold, also he set aside.

"These were my father's knives," he said.

The Honorable John half turned. The tragedy of it was disturbing him.

"I don't know that you need us here for a little," he said. "We'll be in the next room. But we'd like you to go carefully through those things and take what you feel you have a right to—you and Mademoiselle Sonya, here."

He glanced at his partner, as he continued: "If it's all yours, or was once your family's, take it all."

The Colonel nodded heavily, and they went out.

"They want to be in London tonight," said the Honorable John. "And as there are no more trains, you'd better run them up in the car, Sing. So get what you want to eat and fill up with petrol."

SING disappeared. He had a seventy-mile each-way run before him, but was not one of his master's names for him "Ever-Ready?" It was all in the day's work.

When the partners had returned to their strange guests, the heap of jewels had been divided into two, nearly of equal size.

"Which heap contains the property of your and Mademoiselle Sonya's people?" asked the Honorable John, and put a large leather dispatch-case on the table. "That one? Good. We'll pack those in here." The Colonel layered the big case with cotton wool and began carefully to pack the things away.

"And now is there anything else you recognize as belonging to any friends—in the past, monsieur?" inquired the Honorable John.

The girl touched one or two things, and Michael indicated others. The girl was weeping openly.

"We will pack these things with yours,

then," said the Honorable John. "For you're more likely to be able to restore them to their owners if they have survived, than we are."

He passed them to the Colonel, busy at the dispatch-case. For a moment he stared at the diminished heap in silence. Then, carefully, he pushed out with his forefinger an object the sight of which contracted his throat. It was a beautiful little thing, exquisitely made of coral, ivory and mother-of-pearl. There were tiny gold bells upon it. A baby's rattle! On the handle was engraved a miniature crown.

"We—my partner and I—would like you to have this too, mademoiselle," said the Honorable John gently. "You see—we don't understand that sort of thing—except that it hurts to see it among these other things."

Sonya took it.

"Ah, monsieur," she said, caught her breath, and said no more.

The Honorable John hesitated a moment, then swept the remainder of the heap carelessly into a drawer.

It was worth fifty thousand pounds as it stood.

"Better there than in some Bolshevist's safe, monsieur, hey?" he demanded.

Michael bowed and replied:

"If it were possible for those poor victims who once wore the jewels to decide it, they would agree with monsieur—as I do."

"And I also," added the girl.

The lock of the dispatch-case clicked, and the Colonel handed it to the Russian, as Sing appeared at the door to say the car was ready.

THE eyes of the girl were dark-ringed with strain and fatigue, but she and her lover were eager to go, and the partners, understanding, made no attempt to keep them; nor would they listen to more than a few words of thanks.

"No, no—not at all, my dear—nothing more than any gentleman would do," demurred the Honorable John awkwardly. "Go now and—er—live happy ever afterward, both of you. Glad to have helped—hey, Colonel?"

"Sure, sure," agreed his partner.

But Michael leaned through the window as the big car crept forward, and his eyes gleamed coldly in the light of the moon.

"The knives, monsieur, *I* will return," he said sibilantly, "to those from whom we have taken them tonight!"

The partners stared after the car.

"Now, what did he mean by that?" demanded the Honorable John.

But in his heart he knew.

TWO days later they returned to town. The man Araseff arrived at Testmouth on the same day. But whether the two traitors ever discovered their loss neither the Honorable John nor his partner ever knew—for late that night both Araseff and D'Abrinoff were found dead in the garden of Cliffcrest—each with a big hunting knife, its hilt incrusted with gems, its blade inlaid with gold, driven deep in his throat.

It was proved that none of the servants of the house could have been guilty, and no clues were forthcoming. Months later the partners read in a newspaper that it had been found that one of the knives had belonged to a highly placed Russian noble who with his entire family had been killed by the Bolshevists. Consequently—added the report—the discovery of the ownership of the knife shed no light upon an affair which must ever remain a dark and impenetrable mystery.

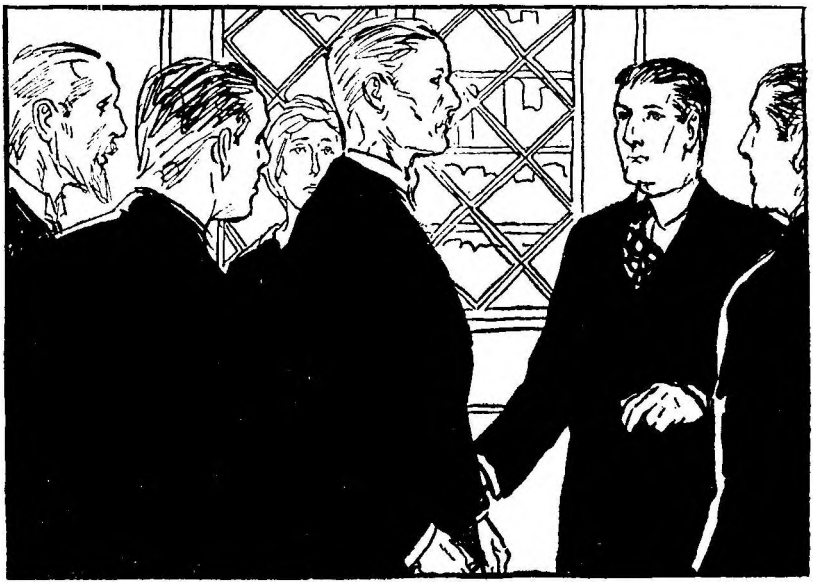
But it was no mystery to the partners. Had not Michael told them that he would return the knives?

Nor did it interfere with the patient liquidation of the jewels which they were extending over a long period of time. Neither of them were what they themselves would have termed "particular" men, but nevertheless it had taken them some time to make up their minds to retain the jewels. For the only alternative to keeping them uselessly locked up seemed to be to send them anonymously to the Government, a thing neither of them were in the least degree likely to do.

And as the Honorable John truthfully said—

"We're crooks right enough, Colonel—damned crooks, you may say, but not crooked enough to keep these things if any of the poor souls who were the real owners of them were alive to take them. But they are not,—through no fault of ours,—and if they had any voice in the matter I think that, as that lad Michael said, they prefer us to have them rather than any Bolshevist. So that's that. Crooks we certainly are—but thank God we haven't sunk to the Bolshevist stage yet. That's what, Colonel."

The Colonel nodded agreement, and they acted accordingly.



The Hand

A Thrilling Mystery Novel

(What has already happened:)

MANY of the wealthy residents of Rockpoint Neck were at Mrs. Joseph Tully Greene's party when it happened. Hope Robinson had just told young Roger Cresson that her father had, without explaining why, forbidden their marriage, when they were summoned inside from the veranda to take part in a fortune-telling séance conducted by a guest, Madame Bernard. And in the middle of that, after dire difficulties had been predicted for Roger Cresson, came the sound of two pistol-shots from outside, followed by the muffled explosions of a departing motorboat. And presently came the word that Wade Robinson, Hope's father, had been murdered in the library of his home, "the Quarterdeck," near by.

Among the Greenes' guests were young Raleigh Ford—a special investigator on furlough from the police commissioner's office—and Tommy Hawbaker, the local district attorney. These, and Mr. Greene, hurried over to the Quarterdeck with Robinson's butler, Harper, and presently were joined by Chief of Police Bunster, Officer Jim Doten and the medical examiner, Dr. Silk. Mr. Robinson, they found, had been killed by a blow from a pistol-butt. A revolver lay on a table near by, with two chambers empty; the wall safe stood open; a small but heavy wooden box lay on the floor near the body.

Presently Officer Doten, who had been searching the grounds, came in with the news that he had found Jake Crandall, a queer religious crank who lived in the neighborhood, lying unconscious, apparently suffering from an apoplectic stroke, in a clump of bushes. And now Lyman Cresson, young Roger Cresson's father and Robinson's neighbor and business associate, arrived. He had called on the murdered man that same evening on a business matter—had left him only a short time before the murder must have taken place.

One clue after another was followed up in the investigations undertaken separately by Raleigh Ford and by Hawbaker and Detective Story. The pistol-shots and the motorboat were found to have had nothing to do with the murder. Nothing else of

# of Esau

By J. Frank Davis

vital importance was learned however, until Crandall recovered sufficiently to be interviewed; he was still unable to speak, but could answer questions by signs. He admitted being a witness to the tragedy, but denied participation, and concluded his testimony by pointing out a verse in Genesis: "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

CHAPTER XIV

SHARPLY Jacob Crandall's head above the coverlet conveyed a message that the quotation was the one he desired. The ancient historian of the beginnings of a race had given speech to his paralyzed tongue across a gulf of thirty centuries.

"I knew it!" ejaculated Story. He leaned over the bed and demanded:

"Who is Esau?"

Instantly, as Crandall's eyes rolled in distress, he saw his mistake, and would have amended the query to some form that might be answered by a simple affirmative and negative, but the old man was beating with his hand, gurgling, his face suffused, again struggling desperately to speak. Doctor Silk spoke with sharp positiveness:

"Not another question! Go out, please —at once! I can't be responsible for any more excitement."

Ford replaced the Bible on the table and let his hand rest for a moment on the old man's. "It's all right, Mr. Crandall," he said. "We understand. Don't worry any more about it. We understand perfectly."

They filed out, leaving the Doctor and Mrs. Bling to minister.

"Do you understand exactly what he meant?" asked Hawbaker, the moment they were through the outer door.

Ford shook his head. "He had to be reassured. He was on the verge of another stroke; it will be rather remarkable if he doesn't have one, anyway. No, I don't know who Esau is. But the old man certainly witnessed the murder. Our only chance of ever having him tell what he saw is to do everything in our power to let him get better."

"With the odds all against it!" Hawbaker grumbled. "Now we are worse up

in the air than we were before. What is your idea, Story?"

"I haven't any," the State detective replied, pleasantly enough but shortly. The way he said it, and the expression of his face, implied that he had a number of ideas, all of which, in due time, would probably be proven excellent.

He and Hawbaker departed in Hawbaker's car. Ford declined Chief Bunster's invitation to ride back to town with him. It was getting on toward dinner-time. He would walk down the Neck to Whalen Lawrence's. He thanked the Chief for the offer to take him there; he sometimes thought things out more clearly walking, he said.

"I don't know but darn little about the Bible," Bunster confessed. "Who was Esau?"

"Jacob's brother."

"That don't get us anywhere. Old Jake hasn't got any brother, not that I ever heard of, anyway."

"And he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. There is quite a lot more about him there in Genesis. Better look it up. I'm going to."

The Chief looked a little sheepish. "Say," he asked, "where do you s'pose I could get one without advertising to the whole town that I need it?"

"A Bible?" smiled Ford. "Well, a considerable number of people still read it; I should say you wouldn't have much trouble. In case you can't think of a friend that might have one, there is always the Public Library."

DICK BAILEY found Ford following his own advice in Whalen Lawrence's den when he called there at nine o'clock that evening, his friend having promised to advise him as to the afternoon's developments. Ford had excused himself from going out for the evening with Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, and had the house to himself.

"Good stuff, so far as it goes," the reporter commented when Ford had told him the happenings in the district attorney's office and Crandall's bedroom, first making the latter proceeding clear by recounting Roger Cresson's reluctant story of the voice in the library. "Did he mean anybody in particular, or only that the voice that Cresson heard and the hand that did the killing belonged to different people?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. Offhand, it might seem that in the effort to think of a reply, he merely associated 'voice' with his own name, and had the inspiration to tell us in that way that he was there but didn't do it. Yet we have to remember that Crandall knows the Bible better than most ministers—that he does practically all his thinking in terms of quotations from it. To him Jacob and Esau are more familiar characters, probably, than the people he sees about him every day. It might easily be that he sees some parallel between the murderer and Esau, if we could find it." He gestured toward the open Scriptures. "I've been looking, but I can't say the reading has got me anywhere."

He picked up the book. "Here are the essential things about Esau. See if any of them seem to mean anything to you in this present connection."

He let his eyes run down the type, sometimes reading, sometimes summing up the story:

"They were twins. Esau was the firstborn. Esau was red and hairy. Esau was a cunning hunter. 'Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.' Isaac, their father, cared most for Esau; their mother loved Jacob best.

"Jacob had a field of red pottage, and Esau came in from hunting exhausted and faint. He asked for pottage to eat, and Jacob bargained with him. 'And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birthright do to me.' 'And he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils, and he did eat and drink, and rose up and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.' "

"If there is any clue thus far, I don't see it," said Bailey.

"Nor I." Ford turned the page and ran his eye forward to the next mention of the elder brother:

" 'And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith . . . . . which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah.' Then comes the story of Isaac's going blind and calling for Esau to go out and hunt venison for him, that he may have one meal such as he most loves before his death. He promises him a blessing. Esau goes, and while he is gone, Rebekah, their mother, who likes Jacob best, tells him to take food which she will prepare in to his father and get the blessing. (This blessing, it appears

later, is to make him head of the family and give him authority over his brethren, and Jacob gets it by the trick his mother planned.) Now, here is the hands and voice part:

"Jacob, being smooth-skinned,—'Behold Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man,'—says they cannot fool his father, who is sure to touch him, but his mother tells him to do as she says and trust her. So she gets some of Esau's good clothes, which the old man recognizes by the smell of fine raiment, and she takes the skins of the goat-kids that Jacob killed for the old man's banquet and fixes them on Jacob's hands and neck so that he will seem to be hairy. Then Jacob goes in and says he is Esau, but the old man is suspicious. He thinks Esau hasn't had time to go hunting and get back. 'And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him.'

"Afterward, when Esau arrived, the old man found out how he had been fooled, but he couldn't take back the authority he had conferred on Jacob. Esau, around that time, intended to kill Jacob for the trick after his father's death, but he didn't; in fact, they ultimately came to be on good terms."

FORD laid the book on the table. "So much for Esau," he said.

"A hairy man," Bailey mused. "Sold his birthright cheap. Got married at forty. Was trimmed out of a blessing by a trick. That seems to sum up the possible parallels old Crandall could have had in his mind."

"Two more. He was a reddish person. And his father and mother didn't approve of his wife."

"That's right. You think Crandall is telling the truth, don't you? He couldn't be slipping something over."

"He could be, but I don't believe it. I think he is telling the truth. I don't believe he killed him."

"That letter Robinson wrote Friday Cresson sixteen years ago—"

"There is more in that letter than the mere statement that 'C' would kill him tomorrow if he dared. For one thing, he said a good many men had threatened him. Dick, when did Wade Robinson first become a prominent figure? He had a line of ships before he went into railroads and traction, but what did he do before that?"

"Search me!" declared Bailey. "How old do you think I am? If you couldn't remember, could I?"

"Oh, it's before either of us was reading the newspapers," Ford agreed, "but I didn't know but you might have heard."

"Never, so far as I recollect."

"Crandall knew him then. Friday Cresson says Crandall and Robinson quarreled before his time with Robinson, and if I'm not mistaken, he and Robinson had been together ever since the day of small beginnings. If Crandall knew him before that, he might know some matter of early history—Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. Wade Robinson has made a business of getting birthrights at about that price, when he could get away with it, ever since I ever heard of him."

"But if somebody that he has trimmed did this, why think it happened in the dim distant past? Surely there are plenty of more or less recent cases."

Ford nodded. "But I doubt if Crandall would be familiar with them. By all accounts, he has been more or less insane for at least fifteen years—perhaps twenty. He hasn't read anything but the Bible. He hasn't even talked any language but Bible language for ten or a dozen years. It's a guess, but I am thinking that if Crandall has any particular person in mind with his Esau reference, it is somebody that Robinson wronged back in the days before he went completely dotty."

"That's the trouble with the whole business," Bailey said. "He has been dotty for years, and he's dotty now. We're figuring on clear thinking from an insane man."

"You've come in contact with insane men in the course of your work. You must admit that they think surprisingly straight sometimes. I don't think this particular thing we are considering is, strictly speaking, the raving of a maniac. I was looking into Crandall's eyes when he was trying to tell us. They didn't look like the eyes of a man with delusions—I mean they didn't look as if he was suffering from delusions at the moment. They were strained, anxious, worried, distressed,—at his difficulty in making himself understood, I should say,—but they had what I should call the light of reason in them."

"No absolute maniac could have invented that way of telling you about the voice and the hands," Bailey admitted.

"IT wont do any harm, anyway," Fred pursued, "to spend a day or so digging a bit into Wade Robinson's past. What shape do you imagine your morgue is in, at the office, as regards his history."

"Good shape, probably. There isn't a better graveyard in Boston."

"I know it. With all the publicity he has had in the past twenty or twenty-five years, there must be a tremendous quantity of data on hand."

"Dozens of envelopes, probably."

"Why don't you tackle it?"

"I'd hate to; it would be one gosh-awful job. I could get the boss to have one of the cubs—"

"You know better. One of the cubs wouldn't find what we want, probably, and if he could, you'd have to tell him all I've just told you before he went to work, and that wouldn't do. It's a man's job; you don't want to send any boy to do it."

"Oh, I admit I dread it because it's a routine stunt, but there's more to it than that. I can't get off this story."

"You would still be working on the story, wouldn't you? There isn't anything going to drop here in Rockpoint tomorrow, probably. Robinson's funeral will be all the story there is here. Get your city editor to send somebody else up to cover that, and you collect all the Wade Robinson stuff in the graveyard and get off by yourself somewhere and go through it. I know it's a tedious job, but there can't anybody else do it. I can't—unless you could arrange to have them lend me the material."

"That couldn't be done. The rule about taking morgue stuff out of the shop is absolute."

"Then I don't see any way for us to get it but for you to handle a few hundred columns of dusty clippings yourself. You wont have to more than glance at the more recent ones, to see if they have any reference to his early life. Dig away back. Look especially for any reference to Australia or the South Sea Islands; the chances are that some captain on one of his ships gave Robinson that old box, and that that is all there is to it, but the box is a mighty unusual one, and finding out where he got it and how long he has had it might tell us something. See if there is anything about his early struggles in business that might give us a line on a possible ancient enemy. Bear in mind all the time you are going over the stuff that you are looking for Esau."

"I guess it's good dope," Bailey conceded with a wry face. "I hate it worse than the State o' Maine man hated to go to Bangor to get drunk, but it ought to be done, sure enough. You'll be here in town. If anything breaks outside of the funeral—"

"I'll phone you," Ford promised.

"I'll call the boss as soon as I get back to the hotel, and if he'll stand for it, maybe I'll go back to town tonight. How did Fred Story take the sad news that he hadn't got his hands on the guilty wretch? Did it irk him sore?"

"Not a single irk," Ford replied. "It pleased him. He didn't think Crandall did it, anyway."

"Who has he got his mind set upon?"

Ford shook his head. "Hawbaker started to tell me, but Story called him down like a stepfather. As far as Hawbaker got was that Story had a theory."

"Having theories is the best thing he does. So he didn't think Crandall did it! That explains, I guess, why he looks so contented tonight. I saw him just after dinner, in the hotel."

"Is he stopping there at the Rockcliff?"

"Yes. When I came out of the dining-room he was talking with two musicians—a little dark chap and an old fellow with a white mustache. Never saw them before in my life, and I know they are musicians and that the young one plays drums and traps and the old one a fiddle! *Holmes*, you are indeed marvelous! Elementary, my dear *Watson*, elementary! There is a dance at the hotel tonight, and the young one had a drum and a bag of traps in his hands, and the other had a violin case."

"And he was hobnobbing with them."

"Hobnobbing is right. He even gave each of them a seven-cent cigar. Again elementary! I didn't observe the band of the cigar, but I know Fred. Thus their conversation came to a mutually satisfactory close, and our hero departed in the direction of the veranda, with a set to his shoulders indicating he hated himself as badly as is his custom."

"Your deduction from all this, *Sherlock?*"

"Is that he is busier than a dog with a new invoice of parasites."

Bailey dropped his joking tone.

"Talking to a couple of musicians might have something direct to do with the job he is working on, and it might not. Story is a cheerful mixer when he lands into a

small town; that may explain why he occasionally wins out; somebody has a perfectly transparent clue and doesn't know it and finally tells it to him, and he can't help recognizing it. Now that you tell me the Crandall interview bore out his theories, whatever they are, I realize it wasn't the conversation with the jazz-artists that made him look so self-satisfied. He has probably been looking that way ever since he went to Crandall's bedside and discovered that he wasn't wrong as usual."

"I have a notion I know what theory Story is working on," Ford said thoughtfully. "And I'm not at all sure that he isn't right."

CHAPTER XV

WADE ROBINSON, in his expensive casket, was being laid in the ornate tomb he had built in Forest Hills, beside the niche in which, for fifteen years, had slept the young wife whom whispering rumor always said his ruthless selfishness drove there. The trappings of fashionable bereavement were seen by few, for there were no relatives except Hope; only the Cressons, the Greenes and members of a scant dozen other families had attended; the funeral at Rockpoint and the subsequent brief ceremonies at the cemetery occasioned scenes of decorous sadness but little grief; of them all, only his daughter had cared especially whether he lived or died.

Back at Rockpoint the summer colonists who had sent flowers and cards of correct condolence were going about their usual business with yachts and fishing-tackle and golf-bags and bridge-scores; the villagers who had gathered at the railroad station to see the solemn undertaker from Boston supervise Robinson's last departure from the community had scattered to gossip over the details; and Tommy Hawbaker sat in his office in the Courthouse with Fred Story leaning confidentially across the table toward him.

The district attorney's impatience of the day before had been dissipated; he was a good-natured young man who found it hard to keep a quarrel burning, and few could be more tactful and flattering when he set out to smooth out a difficulty than Story. The detective had not hesitated to confess that he had been too abrupt and dictatorial. He laid it somewhat to a mythical indigestion. Also he referred to his age, with admiring envy of Hawbaker's. Young men like to have old ones intimate, with the logical implication as to the strength of youth, that advancing age is something to be made allowance for.

Both Tommy and the detective had read their Bibles since Jacob Crandall's dramatic quotation—at least, they had read somebody's Bibles. They too had striven to find therein the parallel that would furnish the identification of Esau. They had come to the conclusion that it was not there. Without discord they had agreed that Esau meant some other person than Jacob, and nothing more.

"Have you got at that young lady yet, to see exactly how much of Cresson's talk she can swear to?" Story asked.

Hawbaker was uncomfortable, looked it, and made no secret of it in his reply:

"No, and I don't want to, if I can help it. The more I think of using something overheard as a guest—"

"You weren't Cresson's guest," Story reminded him pleasantly. He had been giving considerable thought to Hawbaker's scruples and how best to overcome them. "If you had overheard some business of your host, that would be different. Wouldn't it?"

"I suppose so," admitted Hawbaker. "But Cresson and I— We haven't ever been especially friendly, of course, but our relations have always been cordial. He's a decent chap. I wish we could find some way to prove it without going into that talk of his on Greene's piazza."

"Suggest one."

"There aren't any," the young man admitted. "Lord knows, I've been trying hard enough to think of something. Wouldn't the other evidence we've got—that stuff you picked up from those Italians last night and this other evidence you got this morning—be enough to work on for the present? If you were to confront him with it, he might break down and confess."

"We confronted him the other day with a pretty striking bit of evidence. Did he break down? We could arrest him on what we've got now, but it wouldn't convict him. Suppose he kept his mouth shut and stuck to the story he told the other day, with a good lawyer to cross-examine those musicians and this man Whitten, who saw him away over at this end of the Neck Road more than half an hour after the murder. Where would your chances

of convicting him be? I can arrest him, but it's you that has to get the conviction, you know.

"You don't think there's any chance this Whitten could be mistaken?"

"None whatever. He knows Roger Cresson well—that is, by sight. Has known him for years. Cresson turned out of the road when Whitten came up behind him and faced around, right into the headlight."

"Funny he would do that when he might have known he'd be seen," Hawbaker said. "Look here! Doesn't that exactly agree with his story that he was on the Neck Road, three-quarters of the way across toward town here, when he heard of the murder?"

"My own opinion is that when he told that, he was remembering the headlight that he happened to step into, and fixing the explanation of why he was there in case anybody in that car should know him and tell it. Anyway, we don't deny he was there. We admit it. We charge it. The point is that he says he took that long walk across the Neck Road immediately after he heard Jake Crandall preaching to Robinson. Well, he didn't. Long before that, these Paolinos and the other man with them had met him the other side of the Neck Road but this side of Robinson's, going toward the house."

"He certainly went back to the house, and left that out in telling us where he was."

"Exactly. And the fact that he did it, and that he doesn't tell it, is good circumstantial evidence, if it is put with other evidence—such as a motive."

"But I didn't hear any motive," Hawbaker combated weakly. He would have been no fit person for district attorney if he had not appreciated where the logic of the situation must inevitably place him.

"You heard the evidence that they had quarreled, that Robinson had insulted him, outraged him, that he was going right over there. When a man is starting, angry, to call on another, and the other is found murdered soon after, it would be an unusual jury that wouldn't expect the defendant to prove his innocence. An alibi would do it, without any further evidence on his part; but he has no alibi and can't get one. He was out there in the road, just before that murder, and heading toward the house. And he didn't pass it; if he had, he'd have gone back to Greene's."

"When Crandall gets able to talk, he'll tell us." Hawbaker was hedging for delay. "We wont have to wait until he can talk, just as soon as he gets well enough to be questioned some more. He knows who did it. He only needs to be asked if it was Cresson."

"There's mighty little chance that he'll ever talk; and Doctor Silk says there'll be no more questions as long as he is doctoring him. He thought the old man was going to pass out, last night, and today he isn't much better. Yesterday he seemed clear-headed; today the Doctor says he doesn't seem to know anything at all. He is conscious, but his mind isn't functioning. He doesn't get what they say to him. He rolls his eyes and waves his hand, but his brain has gone twisted. If he could speak, he'd be raving."

"Perhaps, in a day or two—"

"Doctor Silk says no one else is going to question Crandall, and that he wont, either. I asked him if he wouldn't. He is sorry he let us go there at all. I guess his professional conscience got to worrying him, last night. We did sort of talk him into letting us hold that séance, you know. His duty to his patient is to help him to get well, not kill him."

HAWBAKER fingered a paper-weight and pondered.

"Your evidence as to what Cresson said," Story went on, taking the fact for granted that the district attorney would give it, "would be invaluable, unless Cresson denied it—which of course he would. Then it would be your word against his. I'm not sure a jury wouldn't believe him as readily as they would you; they'd be sure to if the judge charged them strongly enough regarding reasonable doubt. That means we have to have the young lady. But you can tell her that she may never be called upon to appear in court, and that she probably wont be. You tell the story, and perhaps it will make him confess. More probably, it will start him to explaining, and he'll trip himself with his explanations. Then we don't need anybody to corroborate you. You save her, when the trial comes off, for rebuttal. Perhaps you will never need her. You can promise her she wont have to appear unless it is absolutely necessary."

"That's another thing," Hawbaker said. "She lives in Texas. She is planning to go home in a fortnight or so."

Story had not heard this before. It alarmed him, and at the same time gave him another strong argument.

"Something might happen to take her out of our jurisdiction tomorrow!" he exclaimed. "It wont do to wait for anything, not a minute. You must get her to promise to stay here unless we don't need her. If you can't, we'll have to—" He suddenly sensed that what he was going to say might have the opposite effect from the one he desired, and changed it: "I presume you'd rather not put her under bonds to appear as a material witness?"

"I wouldn't do that."

"Of course not, naturally. That leaves only one thing. We must get her evidence in affidavit form. There isn't a moment to lose. You ought to get it tonight—today."

"She went to Boston with Miss Robinson," Hawbaker said uncomfortably. "They wont be back until a late train."

"Tomorrow, then," Story insisted. "As district attorney, you can't do otherwise."

"Damn being district attorney!" cried the harassed prosecutor. "But you're right, of course. I'll see her tomorrow—tomorrow evening, I guess. I'll ask her to go somewhere in my car. I couldn't talk about it over there at Greene's, with Hope Robinson in the house, and Cresson probably dropping in. Lord, no!"

DICK BAILEY, at about this minute, put away in its dusty manila envelope the last of several hundred newspaper clippings, and returned the lot to the office reference department, more familiarly known in the parlance of his trade as "graveyard" or "morgue." With the result of his day's tiresome labor in his pocket, he caught an evening train. Ford, to whom he had telephoned, met him at the Rockcliffe Inn. They went to Bailey's room.

"About as lean pickings as that much digging ever produced," the reporter announced. "Here is a list of seven men with whom he seems to have had ugly financial quarrels during the years we are trying to check up. Two of them are dead. One lives in Detroit. The other four are in business in New York or Boston, and I'd be willing to bet not one of them has been near Rockpoint this summer, if he ever was."

Ford studied the little typewritten list.

"They don't look very promising," he agreed. "We could probably find out where each of them was that night if we needed to, but I shouldn't say it was worth time and money at this stage of the game."

"As to his early life," Bailey added, "you never saw a bunch of clippings about a prominent character that had less. There is one reference to this very thing. It is in a rather friendly biography that one of the papers ran just after one of his big consolidations; I copied it."

He read:

> Mr. Robinson differs from many self-made men in that he does not boast of his early struggles. "It isn't of any importance how I got started," he told the reporter. "Let some of the other fellows brag about how they overcame fortune, and tell what wonderfully plucky fellows they were and how they formulated a set of rules and lived up to them, and now look where they are; I'm not going to. My vanity doesn't run in that direction. I worked hard. Luck broke with me sometimes. When it didn't, I worked harder."

"Typically cynical, but devoid of facts and figures," Ford commented.

"Here is another reference: 'Robinson was born in New Bedford, of parents who were by no means well-to-do. They died when he was a boy, and he had to shift for himself at an age when most lads are in school.' That's all there is to that. Here's a third one, and the only clipping in the whole lot that could have the slightest bearing on the lignum-vitæ box. It is a part of the report of a Congressional hearing, and Robinson was appearing before the committee." He read from the typewritten copy he had made:

"'But how can you be so certain this proposed bill is not needed by the sailors?" insisted Senator Elkson. "You own many ships, to be sure, but in practical experience you are a railroad and traction man, aren't you?"

"'I know ships; I've sailed in them,' snapped Robinson. 'And I know sailors; I've been one.'"

Ford took the sheet and read the copy of the old newspaper paragraphs.

"I should say," he decided, "that the next place for us to get busy is New Bedford. And trying to get track of an unknown boy who probably sailed from there something over forty years ago looks to be about as hopeless a task as a man could be sent on—hopeless, that is, as to getting quick results. Of course, given time enough and money enough, we could

find the names of a good many thousand sailors—such names as they gave, or as the crimps who used to Shanghai them gave for them. However, if Robinson was born in New Bedford and was an orphan, the chance that he shipped under a false name is rather small, and after all, the number of years that would have to be covered is distinctly limited."

He thought deeply, while Bailey smoked and waited.

"Who is your New Bedford correspondent?" he suddenly asked.

"His name is Benjamin Coffin. Good old Nantucket name, that!"

"Do you know him personally?"

"I've met him down there a couple of times—once when I was covering a strike story, and once when I was to interview a celebrity who was visiting over Nonquitt way and had to develop a local pull to get at him."

"What kind of man?"

"Nice fellow, he seems to be. He isn't on one of the local sheets like most of the correspondents of Boston papers. Just works for us. He's an oldish chap, about fifty, I should say, with some means of his own, so that he doesn't have to depend entirely on what he earns for a living. He's a bug on old whaling times in the town; somebody said he had been working goodness knows how many years gathering material for a book."

"He ought to be just the man," Ford said decidedly. "He will be familiar with what records are in existence and what are not, and where to find old logs and all that sort of thing, and browsing around digging up ancient history is right in his line; he likes it. Also, if he has been at it for a few years, nobody will get especially curious as to what he's looking for. Give me a letter to him, will you? I'm going to run down there and get acquainted with him tomorrow."

CHAPTER XVI

MR. BENJAMIN COFFIN was quite willing to undertake the task. Delving into facts that dealt with the old days when ships and sailors from New Bedford went up and down the Seven Seas in close procession was his hobby; Ford also gathered that swollen living-costs had contracted the power of his inherited capital so that such increased income as the work would produce would not be unwelcome. It was late Friday afternoon when their first conference broke up, too late to start any investigations that day. They agreed that the first thing to determine was whether or not Robinson had been born in the city; knowing his age, this should prove easy. It did prove so. Before noon on Saturday, Mr. Coffin came from his search with word that he had found the record.

"Now it is just a case of digging into shipping-lists and old logs," he said. "I shouldn't suppose I'd need to go back of '77 or later than '85, say. That covers eight years. I might find something in a day or two, or it might take weeks."

"Keep plugging until I ask you to stop," Ford said. "When you find something,—if you do,—phone or wire me. Here are three addresses. You had better wire in triplicate to all of them."

Arriving in Boston, he crossed the South Station concourse to the big waiting-room, went to the telephone-exchange in the corner, and called his house. His Japanese servant replied.

"I'll be out to dinner tonight if you've got anything good to eat, Kiku," he said.

"Oh, shut *tupp!*" shouted Kiku.

"What's that?"

"Excoose, Misser Ford. I'm telling Stubby stop barkin'. Can't you hear him?"

Ford made out sharp crackling sounds that he easily interpreted into the riotous yapping of his fox terrier.

"He's stan'in' right here makin' awful noise," complained Kiku proudly. "He say he knows I'm talkin' to you, an' he wants to talk too."

"All right. Tell him I'll converse with him at dinner-time."

"Yessir. Misser Greene called on telaphone. He says if I hear anything 'bout you please say call him quick's you can. At office."

"When?"

"Li'l' while ago. 'Bout fifteen minutes."

"I'll get in touch with him. Dinner at half-past six."

"Yessir, Misser Ford."

He got Greene's office, and a moment later Greene.

"I thought you might get in on that afternoon train," the broker said. "Some things have happened that you ought to know. I can't tell them over the phone.

Come have dinner with me at the club. I'll stay in until a late train."

"Make it at my house, can't you? I just told Kiku I'd be home. I had half a notion of staying home tonight, but if you come out, I'll go back to Rockpoint with you."

"You're on," Greene acquiesced. "About six-thirty?"

"Yes."

HE called Kiku again and ordered him to lay two places. Then he started for the door to the concourse (having to be called back by an alert and suspicious clerk to be reminded that he hadn't paid for the calls, as is quite usual but nevertheless embarrassing) and was just passing through it when he saw Roger Cresson, back to him, a little distance away in the direction of the main entrance. Cresson was in a line of men slowly approaching a window at which only tickets for special-fare trains are sold. Ford slipped to a point where he could see but could probably not be seen by Cresson even if the other turned, and waited.

When the young man reached the window, he bought a ticket. Ford could see that it was but one ticket, and he also observed that he paid for it from an apparently well-filled bill-fold, and that he received six or seven bank-notes as change. No especial detective ability was necessary to figure that, as the ticket-seller had presumably made change with the largest bills possible, Cresson had received several tens or twenties. It followed that he had put out for the ticket either a fifty-dollar or a hundred-dollar bill. As he would hardly offer a large bill if he had a smaller one, it also followed that the fat bill-fold contained a large sum—quite obviously several hundred dollars, perhaps a thousand. Roger Cresson, wherever he was going, was setting forth well provided against any cash shortage.

Cresson, as soon as he was out of the line, went into the waiting-room, found a seat at the far side, leaned back and tipped his hat over his eyes. Ford looked at the big clock; its hands pointed to four-twenty-five. The only special-fare train that a passenger could be waiting for at that hour would be the Merchants' Limited.

Roger, fortunately, was some distance from the telephone-exchange. Ford got police headquarters and was lucky enough to find Commissioner Calder at his desk and Detective Lederer within quick call. Twenty minutes later, as Cresson was lifting his suitcase from the floor and preparing to move toward the train-shed, Lederer jumped from a taxicab at the Summer Street entrance and hurried to where Ford stood by the east waiting-room door.

"Just leaving the 'Plymouth' seat. Good-looking young man with a suitcase in his left hand, fixing his hat with his right," Ford said.

"I get him."

"Roger Cresson, son of old Friday. Does he know you by sight?"

"Not likely. I don't remember ever having seen him before."

"He has a ticket on the Merchants'. Go along with him. Did the Colonel give you any orders?"

"Only to do whatever you said."

"Stick to him until further notice. Don't pinch him, never mind what happens, unless he attempts to leave the country, and even then don't, if there is time to ask for instructions—and there ought to be, with the present passport-regulations. Keep me posted where he goes and roughly, what he does. Wire me how to reach you by telegraph once a day, or more often, if necessary. In duplicate, at headquarters and— No, you'd better not try to get me at Rockpoint. It's too small a town; there might be a leak. Better not wire me at all; wire the Colonel. I'll arrange with him to pass the word along."

Cresson was moving with many others through the gates to the waiting Limited.

"Is he making a get-away?" Lederer asked.

"I don't know. I just happened to run into him. The chances are at least even it is a perfectly innocent trip, except that he is carrying a bigger roll than he ought to need for any business trip, easy as it is for him to get checks cashed, and that he has been trying to be inconspicuous ever since I first saw him. If it is all right, you get a nice ride to New York and a little chance to see whether they have moved Broadway over into the North River. If it isn't, we'll know where he is."

"You're still on the same case, aren't you?"

"Yes."

Lederer's eyebrows raised, as again he appraised the youth whose bag a porter was taking at a car-step. "What's the idea? Might he have been the one who put the old man away?"

"There are some things he hasn't explained yet. It's a good idea not to lose sight of him until they are straightened out. If he should stay in New York and move around so much that there is a chance of his noticing you, call up New York headquarters and get somebody to help you out. It's most train-time, and you have to have a seat for the Merchants', you know."

"All right. I wont lose the gentleman," Lederer promised, and hurried to the ticket-window. Just as the incandescent bulbs down the platform were flashing their starting-signal, Ford, standing outside the gate, saw him disappear into the train.

GREENE reached Ford's house at six-fifteen, which gave them some moments before dinner.

"Some queer things have been happening," the broker began. "They are past me. In the first place, Tommy Hawbaker and your old friend Story suspect Roger Cresson of having killed Robinson. And they've got some evidence that certainly needs explanation."

"Do you know what it is?"

"Yes—some of it, anyway. When he went over to Robinson's to do an errand he says he forgot— Wait! Let me begin somewhere near the beginning. Roger Cresson and Hope were out on the piazza talking, that night, just before the fortune-telling began. I know that myself, because I went out and called them in. Tommy Hawbaker and Florence Appley were also out there. I know that too. And it seems Roger was mad as blazes with Robinson and slipped out the minute he'd got his fortune told, to go over there and have it out with him—and come right back. Well, he didn't come back."

"Who says he was going to have something out with Robinson?"

"Hope does. He does. And Tommy and Florence heard more or less of what he was saying. I suppose he thought he was talking confidentially, but he was mad, and he let his voice get too loud. So Tommy told Story, and they decided they needed corroborative evidence, and Tommy asked Florence to verify what they'd heard. Well, she wouldn't."

"Wait a minute. You say she heard it."

"Yes. But she wont admit to him she did."

"Why?"

"That girl is as superstitious as an old witch. You remember she was one of those that had their fortunes told, before the party was broken up."

"Yes. She was the second one, just after Cresson. Isn't it rather odd, by the way, if Cresson was angry and going right over to have trouble with Robinson, as you say, that he should have stopped to fuss with a fortune-teller?"

"I was responsible for that." Greene described how his wife had sent him to get the youth to be the first victim, in order that there should be no delay in getting the entertainment under way. "Well, that 'reading' that the old lady gave her made a tremendous impression on Florence. It seems she has gone in for that sort of thing a good deal, and is more or less of an enthusiast on it. She says Madame Bernard makes a lot of talk about being merely an entertainer but that she is really a wonderful psychic. And the Madame told her that a matter was coming up soon, before she left for Texas, that would cause her great annoyance, but that her good sense would tell her what to do and the difficulty would pass."

"I remember something of that sort. Not unusual patter."

"But it seems that when Madame Bernard told her to ask a mental question, she asked, to herself, who would bring that difficulty about, and the Madame answered, just as if she had asked it out loud, that it would be a young, light-complexioned man with good intentions. Tommy Hawbaker! Then she said that this young man would ask Florence to make a decision, and that she had better change her mind. Well, when Tommy asked her, she saw no reason for not telling him, and opened her mouth to do so, and then she remembered the warning and followed it."

"I see—more or less," Ford said. "I take it for granted neither Hawbaker nor Story told you. Was it Miss Appley?"

"She told my wife and Hope. And Hope telephoned Roger to come over in a hurry. This was early last evening."

"Miss Robinson explained, I suppose, what Roger was going to see Robinson about."

"That's the first queer thing. She flatly wouldn't. She was terribly worked up, of course, about anybody thinking Roger could have had anything to do with the murder,—Miss Appley didn't tell her anything of that sort, of course, but Hope

isn't slow-witted,—but she told Florence and my wife it was a little private matter between only themselves, and that there was no reason now why it should be discussed at all. No reason *now!* That qualification wouldn't help him any, if the whole business came out."

"And Roger. Did he come over?"

"On the run. Hope met him out of doors, and they talked it over together. We supposed they would come in afterward, but Hope came in alone and said he had gone. And here is Queer Thing Number Two: He told her that it was all nonsense, of course, but that he thought perhaps it would be best for them to keep the thing quiet and wait for it to blow over. She looked puzzled. If I am not mistaken, she had rather expected him to go and confront somebody, like they do in the movies, and demand that he either prove his charges or cease casting innuendoes, but confronting anybody did not seem to appeal to him at all. He seems to have told her—as near as my wife and Florence could make out from the little she had to say about it—that maybe it would save both him and her trouble and inconvenience if he went away for a bit, and 'let fool gossip die down.' She quoted him on that; he called it 'fool gossip.' "

"And then?"

"That's all there was to it, so far as I knew last night, but Myra called me on the phone about four this afternoon—that's when I began to try to find you—to say that he went straight home from our house, packed a bag and took an evening train for Boston. His father was here in town yesterday and hadn't got back to Rockpoint when he left; their trains passed. He didn't wait to see the old man—just beat it! And up to three this afternoon, he hadn't got back."

A NIGHT at a Boston hotel, time in the morning to cash checks inconspicuously, to see his father, if necessary or advisable, thought Ford. He said:

"I don't believe he will get out of reach."

"But what does it mean? He couldn't have any reason to kill her father; it's impossible. And if he had, she wouldn't be smoothing it out and helping him to escape. But if he didn't go over there and have a quarrel and do it, what in thunder is he running away for?"

"Dinner served," announced Kiku in the doorway.

Until coffee and cigars, there was no further chance for confidential talk. Then, in the library, Greene voiced another angle of the case that was vexing him:

"The more I think about what Florence Appley says about old Madame Bernard being a wonderful psychic, and all that sort of stuff, the more I remember how close she came to hitting things that night. She told Roger there was news coming and that a boat was concerned in it. Something was going to happen that involved the letters *C* and *R*. Cresson and Robinson. Crandall. Creel. Great Peter, what a combination of *C's* and *R's!* She told him he had a white-haired enemy. And darned if I don't seem to remember that she told him a beautiful girl would refuse to believe ill of him—and one certainly has. I don't put any stock in this psychic thing. Well, is there but one other answer? How did the old woman come to *know* so much?"

"She didn't," Ford said. "The proof of that is that she told it."

"But here was Roger waiting impatiently to get through with her so he could go over and have a scrap with Robinson over the Lord knows what—but it was serious enough for him to raise his voice out there on the piazza so Tommy could hear him down at the other end—and she tells him he's booked for trouble with a white-haired antagonist. Did she read his mind?"

"Possibly. 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio.' "

"That woman knows too much. I'm not the only one who thinks so, either."

Ford's look was inquiring.

"Chief Bunster has been making a lot of inquiries about what she said that night." He grinned at the expression on Ford's face. "Oh, I know if Bunster gets after a clue, it's a good bet to copper, but it shows somebody else has thought of it besides me. There must have been quite a lot of gossip about that fortune-telling, or he wouldn't ever have heard of it; it takes a lot of talk for any thing that happens over in our houses on the Neck to get circulated in the village." Greene bit at his cigar uneasily. "To tell you the truth, I don't like to have gossip like that going on about a woman that Myra introduced. Nobody knows who she is, or even where she lives."

"I may look her up some day, when I have time," Ford said easily. "I don't want to hustle a guest, but let's get that eight o'clock train. It's a lot cooler down on the shore. I'll phone for a taxi."

CHAPTER XVII

THREE days passed, and Roger Cresson had not been seen in Rockpoint or at the Robinson offices in Boston. There was no gossip over his absence, because it had been explained to the satisfaction of everyone but the few who suspected him; his father had said casually on the day following his departure that he had gone on a business-trip that might prove protracted. Except for Hawbaker, Story, Hope Robinson, Florence Appley and the Greenes, no one either in Rockpoint or Boston felt any special curiosity.

Ford talked over the telephone with Police Commissioner Calder or the commissioner's secretary, every day, and received a cautiously worded summary of Tom Lederer's reports. Roger Cresson had selected the most satisfactory haystack in the world for the hiding of a human needle —the heart of a big city. He was occupying the second floor front of a respectable rooming-house in the East Fifties, spending most of his days as well as his nights there, although New York was palpitating under a hot wave. A servant with a fondness for ice-cream sodas gave the information to Lederer that he was a salesman waiting for a job which wouldn't begin to function until the first of the month, or perhaps a little later. He would have a fat chance holding any job after he got it, the girl prophesied, as lazy as he was! Hardly left his room except for meals, which he got at a little quick-service restaurant around the corner on Sixth Avenue. A nut on reading newspapers; he bought every New York paper morning and afternoon, and other papers too—Boston papers. His name, it appeared, was Robert Clark. The initials were on the end of his suitcase.

IN the early forenoon of the fourth day Story came into Hawbaker's office and locked the door behind him. He had in his hand a little flat package wrapped in newspaper.

"I've got it," he exulted. "I was right. Friday doesn't know where he is any more than the rest of us. He's shielding him."

He removed the paper and disclosed a square of cardboard, upon which had been pasted a hundred or more fragments of torn paper, fitted together like a jigsaw puzzle.

"Have you got it all?" Hawbaker inquired.

"Every scrap of it, and believe me, it was the hardest job of the kind I ever did. It took—I was just figuring it out coming over from the hotel—more than twenty solid hours. Old Friday tears his waste-basket contents exceedingly fine."

He displayed, in Roger Cresson's handwriting, a note:

> Dear Father:
> A matter has suddenly come up that makes it necessary for me to go away for a few days, perhaps for a few weeks. I shall probably not write. Do not be concerned if you do not hear from me. If there are inquiries, perhaps it might save gossip if you say I am away on business for the office.
> ROGER.

Hawbaker studied the letter. "Say!" he cried. "Do you suppose the old man knows?"

"From this, he might or he mightn't. The boy doesn't hint why he is leaving, but he wouldn't, anyway. If the old man doesn't know, he certainly wouldn't tell him, and if he does know, there wouldn't be any need to. But it proves that he went in so much of a hurry that he couldn't wait over one train to see his father—and that this talk about his being off on business is all guff."

The district attorney nodded agreement.

"Listen!" Story declared. "It has come to the time when we've got to send out an alarm asking the police of different cities to look for him, on the quiet. And we can't do that unless there is something against him."

"We could get Bunster to—"

"We couldn't. He'd blat it all over the State. It has to be done under cover, and there's only one way to do that. Your new Grand Jury gets together a week from next Monday. Indict him—secretly."

"There isn't evidence enough to convict," Hawbaker objected.

"There's enough to indict."

"Yes, but—"

"We've got to take some chances in this world—and the chances in this are mighty few. You and I know well enough that he did it. If we can get hold of him, he'll loosen up, whether he wants to or not. He isn't smart enough to explain all the things he'll have to explain without putting his foot in it."

"If we had a little more corroborative evidence—if Miss Appley could remember that talk I overheard—"

"Whether she does or not, we'll have enough to go before the Grand Jury with.

You want to remember, also, that while we wouldn't want to take her before the Grand Jury, we can put Miss Robinson on the stand when the trial comes off, and make her tell what he said. And all kinds of new things can come to light before a week from Monday; I'm going to stay right on the job."

"Perhaps Crandall will be able to talk before then. He doesn't seem to be getting any worse, and that probably means he's getting better. Doctor Silk says that men in his condition sometimes get their speech back suddenly, and use of their limbs too. If he gets to a point where Silk will let us see him—"

"That will cinch it. In the meantime, get ready to present the whole thing to the Grand Jury, Crandall or no Crandall. I want to know that you are going to do it."

"What's to be gained by deciding at this minute."

"When I know officially that you're going to ask for an indictment, I can send out confidential inquiries to the different police departments to keep their eyes open for him. We can locate him, perhaps, and be ready to take him in as soon as the secret indictment is returned."

"Why can't you be trying to locate him anyway?"

STORY shook his head. "I'd have to have something official to go on, before sending out notices broadcast."

"All right," Hawbaker conceded, after a moment. "Get out your notices. If nothing happens to alter our present opinions, I'll indict him."

"Whatever happens, if anything does, will strengthen them," Story promised. His eyes fell on the street.

"Hello," he said. "There goes Ford toward the depot in Whalen Lawrence's car, with a bag and suitcase. Giving it up as a bad job and getting back to work, I guess."

Hawbaker agreed absent-mindedly. "I wish I could figure out what that lignum-vitæ box had to do with it," he said. "You felt sure, you know, that whoever did the killing probably wanted that."

"I said 'probably,'" Story qualified. "It was just a clue that needed to be cleaned up. When we found the only thing in it referred to Crandall, and that Crandall didn't kill him, that ended the box as evidence. It just happened to be there in the room."

"You're right, undoubtedly,—that's what I thought, at first,—but it keeps coming back into my mind. There wasn't any reason why Roger Cresson should want it."

"None whatever. So that eliminates the box." Story looked at his watch. "I'm going over to my room and write a letter to be sent out to a lot of police departments, telling them to look for him. I'll bring it over and show it to you before I send it in to headquarters. It needs to be worded carefully, very carefully."

RALEIGH FORD boarded a train for Boston. In his inner breast pocket was a telegram, dated New Bedford, which read:

> Have found required data.
>
> COFFIN.

By the middle of the afternoon he sat with the correspondent at one end of a long reading table in a high-ceilinged, many-windowed hall. Surrounding them were models of whaling ships famous in their generation, a whale's jawbone, yellow ivory teeth, harpoons, lances, spades. On the walls were oil paintings of clipper ships rushing before fair winds, all canvas spread. There were bookcases filled with stories of a vanished day in the quaint, laconic phraseology of old logbooks. One of these books Coffin had just secured from the museum attendant and was now opening to the beginning of a voyage. A pasted label on its cover bore the information that it contained the log of the bark *Cassius Gibbs*, from a date in 1881 to one in 1883.

"Here is the list of officers and crew," Coffin said, and rested his finger on the faded handwriting, where appeared the roster of able seamen shipped in New Bedford at the beginning of the voyage. "There they are, all three of them. Crandall, Cresson, Robinson."

He turned the pages rapidly.

"There is no reference to any of them that amounts to anything until April, 1882," he said. "Here it is, on the twentieth. You might begin reading the entry of the day before—the nineteenth."

The captain of the *Cassius Gibbs* wrote a crabbed hand, but plain. Ford had no difficulty in reading rapidly:

> April 19.
>
> Wind fair. Sea smooth. At 5 bells in afternoon watch raised land to SE. One of the Kermadecs. Shortened sail to make land after daylight. Will touch, wind and

weather permitting, as drinking water is getting very low. Lat. 176° 32′ W. Long. 30° 12′ S. So ends the day.

April 20.

Laid off and on and sent first mate's and second mate's boats ashore for water. Falling glass and signs of weather, signaled boats to return to ship at once, and they did so, reporting Carpenter Weed and Seamen Crandall, Robinson and Cresson left others and went inland and had not returned when signal given. Coming on to blow from NNW and glass still falling and no sufficient harbor, made sail and set course SSE. Wind half a gale and sea rising. So ends this day.

April 21.

Wind a gale from N, veering to NW. Sea heavy. Course SSE. Seaman Welch carried by sea against capstan and broke his leg. No observation. So ends this day.

April 22.

Wind a gale from NW. Sea heavy. Ran before wind SE. Second mate Hiram Innis washed overboard at 5 bells A. M. watch. Brought Boatswain James Drew aft as second mate. At 3 bells afternoon watch forward hatch sprung and broaching seas came into hold. Called all hands to pumps. No observation. So ends this day.

For three more days, through the twenty-fifth, the entries were the history of a ship in the clutch of vast winds and buffeting seas, short-handed, battered, half waterlogged. There was no sun. For many hours the *Cassius Gibbs* was hove to. The story of the storm's decrease came suddenly and as unemotionally as the rest:

April 26.

Wind fresh from E. Sea rough. Gaining on water with pumps. Set course WSW to make Wellington for overhauling and additional crew. Lat. 176° 8′ W. Long. 41° 53′ S. Wind moderating at night. So ends this day.

And three days later a crisp, condensed summary of the first day in safe harbor:

April 29.

Made port at Wellington, New Zealand. Set crew to work to overhaul and make fit for sea. Shipped Andrew Pallus, carpenter, and John Gret, Horace Smith, Mike Quill and Fritz Miller, able seamen. Called on consul and notified him of four men left on Kermadec. He promises to notify masters of boats bound there to look out for them. Seaman Welch taken ashore for medical treatment. All now well on board. So ends this day.

Ford looked up.

"They all went ashore together on one of the Kermedec Islands, and either deserted or came back to find their ship gone," he said. "Is there any further mention of them in the log?"

"Not a line."

"And the history of that association of theirs ends when they went ashore. Getting anything more about it is pretty hopeless, isn't it?"

"It would be if we had to chance finding them mentioned in some other log—the one of the ship that took them off the island, for instance, which would very likely not be an American ship, and would be still less likely to be a New Bedford one. But I want you to notice the name of that ship-carpenter who was with them." He turned back to the initial roster of the crew. "Elhanan Q. Weed. That isn't a name that according to any reasonable probability would belong to two New Bedford sailors in the same generation, is it?"

"Elhanan Weed is an unusual name. With the 'Q,' I should say it ought to be unique."

Mr. Coffin took from his pocket a little leather-covered memorandum-book and found a short newspaper clipping loose between its leaves.

"This is a piece of sheer luck, and nothing else," he declared triumphantly. "It was in one of the local papers only last Thursday, and when I came across the name in this old log, naturally I recalled it. I went over and got a copy of the paper and clipped it."

Ford read, absorbedly:

ALMOST A CENTENARIAN.

Captain Elhanan Q. Weed of Acushnet was 97 years of age yesterday, and many friends called to congratulate him on having approached so close to the century mark. He was in good health and spirits and assured all his callers that he expected to enjoy "many happy returns of the day."

The old gentleman was born in Acushnet, which was then called "The Head o' the River," and makes his home with his granddaughter, Mrs. Lydia Manlove, not a half mile from the site of his birthplace. He followed the sea from youth until he was more than sixty years of age, and many is the thrilling story he tells visitors of the old days of sailing ships. Captain Weed, although he has been confined to the house by rheumatism for many years, retains his faculties marvelously, and his sight and hearing are but little impaired.

CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. MANLOVE, a stout woman well over fifty, took them into the sitting-room where sat the ancient in a cushioned rocking-chair beside an open window. The day was hot, but a little

breeze was beginning to whisper up from the river mouth, and he had an afghan across his knees. "Here's some folks to see you, Gran'pa," she told him, and he peered at them curiously and commanded: "Bring 'em in and ask 'em to set down. Howdy-do. Nice weather we're havin', aint it? Kinda hangs on. Nuthin' like the hot spells used to, nor not so hot, either. I remember, in the summer of 1866—or mebbe it was '67—anyway it was—"

"Yes, Gran'pa," the woman broke in. "Mebbe the gentlemen came to see you about somethin' p'tic'lar."

"Nobody's a-henderin' of 'em sayin' so if they have, is they?" he flared.

"No, Gran'pa," she agreed. She addressed Ford and Coffin quite as though the old man were not present: "You'll have to sort o' break in on him, likely, when he gets to runnin' on."

"My name is Ford," the detective said, "and this is Mr. Coffin. We saw in the paper—"

"Any relation to Cap'n Hezekiah W. Coffin?" demanded Mr. Weed. "I sailed with him on the old *Trident*."

"We're all the same family; he was long before my time."

"Goddy, goddy, goddy, but he was a dabster! There'd been a spell o' weather one time, an' come Sunday it looked like he couldn't have prayers, an' he never missed 'em Sundays, come calm, come wind. He stood there at the break o' the poop-deck, hangin' on, 's ye might say, by his eyelashes an' toenails, an' he hollers: 'Lay aft for prayers, damn ye! Come lively, ye—' "

"The gentleman was sayin' he saw in the paper, Gran'pa," Mrs. Manlove recalled him.

"About your birthday party," Ford hastened to supply. "We thought we'd like to come up and talk with you about some of your old experiences."

"Yessir. It was in the paper. Get the piece an' show it to 'em, Lyddy."

"He says they've seen it, Gran'pa."

"I says to everybody that come, 'I'm going to enjoy many happy returns of the day.' Made 'em laugh like good ones, *I* tell ye. I am, too. Ninety-seven years old last Wednesday, an' I can eat as good a meal o' vittles as anybody—or I could, if I had my teeth."

"You followed the sea until you were over sixty—" Ford began.

"No sech a thing!" Weed contradicted. "It said so in the paper, but it wasn't so. That feller that wrote it up and put it in the paper got it wrong. I was fifty-eight. I quit my last v'yage before I was fifty-nine, even, let alone sixty. Never could believe more'n half what they put in the papers."

FORD did a quick and simple problem in mental arithmetic.

"Your last voyage was in the *Cassius Gibbs*, then."

"How'd ye know that? Goddy, goddy, goddy, but she was a hell-ship."

"Mr. Coffin is writing a book. He's getting stories about the old sailing days. We'd like to have you tell—"

"Aint nobody can tell about 'em better'n me. Aint nobody can remember 'em back as far as me. Ninety-seven last Wednesday, an' from the time I was sixteen till eighteen hundred an' eighty-two I sailed in 'em all. Schooners, whalers, traders, clippers— I'll tell ye 'bout a v'yage I shipped in the *Nancy Orton*, in '74. There was a clipper! Set sail from this port on the twentieth day of August, and in a hundred an' thirty-two days—"

"I know we'd like to hear about that some day, Captain Weed, but right now, if you don't mind, we'd like to hear about that time you got left ashore on one of the Kermadecs—that last voyage you sailed on the *Cassius Gibbs*."

"How'd ye hear about that?"

"Somebody said you had an interesting story about it. Four of you went ashore, and a hurricane came up, and the *Cassius Gibbs* had to put to sea and leave you."

"Didn't leave us till we'd gone an' left her," the patriarch declared. "Didn't leave us till we'd gone an' left her. No more chance of gettin' us back aboard that ship, the Cap'n didn't have, even if it hadn't come on to blow, than a snowball'd have—"

"Gran'pa!" interrupted Mrs. Manlove.

"Than a snowball'd have in New Guinea, I was goin' to say. Lyddy! Don't keep a-pesterin' of me when I'm talkin' to the comp'ny."

"Bad ship, was she?" Coffin encouraged.

"Know what a Yankee hell-ship was?"

"I've heard of a good many of them."

"That was her. When I got shet of her, I says: 'That's the end of it. You're fifty-eight years old, Elhanan, an' you better let the young fellers stand it instid of you.' Not that I couldn't. There wasn't a young feller aboard that could've stood it better'n me."

"After you got ashore on the Kermadec?" Ford reminded him. "Tell us what happened?"

"What for?"

"I'm writing a book, you know," Coffin said easily. "We heard it was a very interesting story; what happened on that island?"

"Don't know who told ye," grumbled the old man. "I aint never told about that, have I? Who'd I tell? Have I ever told that story about bein' with Aleck an' Scotty an' Red on that island, Lyddy?"

"I guess prob'ly, Gran'pa," she replied placidly. "You've told a lot of stories."

"Mebbe I have, if you say so. Mebbe I have. Goddy, goddy, goddy, but that's a long time ago, and yet it's jest like yest'day, some ways." He peered at them again with cunning in his eyes and voice. "That feller that told you about us bein' on one o' the Kermadecs, he didn't mention no names, did he?" And instantly, before Ford or Coffin had opportunity to say that they knew the names, he added, with great positiveness: "'Cause if he did, I aint goin' to say a cussed thing about it."

"It would be just as interesting a story without the names, I should think," Coffin suggested. "Never mind the names."

"I can't remember 'em, anyway," Weed said slyly. "Never did remember 'em. Not for thirty-forty years. What do you want to know about it for?"

"We heard it was a thrilling story. Heard you told it well, too."

THE old man smirked. "I always ben a pretty good one to spin yarns," he conceded. "Lot o' folks used to come to hear me spin yarns, didn't they, Lyddy?"

"Yes, Gran'pa."

"Don't come as much as they used to. Guess the ones that knew a good story when they heard it are most of 'em dead." He added cheerfully: "About everybody anywhere as near as old as me is dead. I don't know a livin' soul that's ninety-seven years old. Do you?"

"Not one. You landed on the island, and went inland, I understand, while the ship was laying off and on."

"Who told ye that? That's the way it was. And glad enough to get shet of that hell-ship we was, too. The boys,—they was just boys, compared to me, you know, —they sort o' left things to me, first along, anyway, an' I took 'em to a place I knew. I'd been there once on another v'yage, on the *Amphrodite,* or mebbe it was— I shipped on the *Amphrodite* in—"

"It's the *Cassius Gibbs* you're tellin' 'em about, Gran'pa—or goin' to."

"Lyddy! Don't keep puttin' your oar in! Where was I?"

"You and the other three went inland to hide until the *Cassius Gibbs* had left," Coffin suggested.

"So she put to sea, and then we come out an' stayed there about a month or mebbe six weeks. When we got to Wellin'ton, I left 'em. I never had no dealin's with 'em from that day to this. But they were strong men, every one of 'em. Too all-cussed strong for me!"

"That was the story you were going to tell, you know—about what they did on the island that made you quit them."

IT was more or less a shot in the dark, but not altogether so; whatever made him break off their association had apparently taken place between the day they deserted their ship and their arrival at the New Zealand port.

"Who said they did anything? What did they do? Do you mean about the pearls?"

"That is part of the story, isn't it?"

"I didn't have a cussed thing to do with them pearls except—" His nostrils snuffed the air. "Lyddy, there's somethin' burnin' on," he warned.

"Biscuits," his granddaughter cried, and fled weightily.

"Except—" Ford prompted.

"Except to take one or two—jest a few of 'em. Goddy, goddy, goddy! I had to, or they'd 'a' knifed me too, sure as ever you're a-sittin' there."

"Who was it they knifed?"

"I aint good at rememb'rin' names, late years," Weed craftily hedged. "Don't know's I ever did know it. Anyway, he didn't come honest by 'em himself. He was workin' his way south, layin' low, I guess, till whoever he stole 'em from stopped cuttin' up didoes. An' Aleck happened to get a look at 'em."

"And killed him?"

"How in thunder do I know who killed him? I wasn't there." Neither of them doubted the old man's veracity. "I didn't have nuthin' to do with it, an' I didn't know nuthin' about it until after it was all past and done with, an' if it hadn't been dangerous for me not to take a few of the pearls— If I hadn't, they'd 'a' thought I meant to blab on 'em, wouldn't they?"

"Of course," Ford said. "And all three of them were there when it was done?"

"Who told ye that? Red wasn't. He was in with 'em—got his share, all hunky-dory. But he was over on that road that run up from the water, watchin' that nobody come up an' disturbed 'em."

"It was Aleck or Scotty, of course."

"Who said anything about Scotty? Who do ye mean by Scotty?"

"You did, didn't you? I understood you to say that the three men with you were Aleck and Scotty and Red."

MRS. MANLOVE entered the room, wiping her hands on her apron.

"Lyddy, did I call any names about them fellers that was with me on the *Cassius Gibbs?*"

"Yes, Gran'pa. Aleck and Scotty and Red were the nicknames you gave 'em."

"And it's the only names I ever give 'em," he mumbled. "Not once, in most forty years." He raised his voice truculently. "I don't know what ever become of 'em. Never did know. Never see any of their names in the paper, or anything. May be dead, for all I know. Prob'ly are."

"It's just as interesting without names," Coffin smiled. "Good yarn, too. And you know how to tell it. Those three divided the pearls, except for your few—and kept them till you all got to Wellington?"

"That Scotty couldn't keep nuthin'. I never see a young feller that would gamble like him. Bet on anything. One time I knew of his bettin'—"

"Gambled while waiting for a ship, did you?"

"Who? Not me! I didn't have nuthin' to gamble, 'ceptin' only about nine, or mebbe twelve pearls, an' they wa'n't any of 'em big or specially valuable—not compared to some of the others. I needed to keep 'em, if I wasn't goin' to foller the sea no more, didn't I? An' I'd made up my mind that I'd never ship aboard another vessel. Twa'n't as if I'd ever got aft. Everybody calls me 'Cap'n,' of course, an' I guess I got a right to be called 'Cap'n,' old as I am an' long as I follered the sea, but I hadn't never been even a mate. Not knowin' navigation—an' I never had the head for cipherin' to learn it—"

"You was tellin' about them three gamblin'," Mrs. Manlove reminded him.

"No sech a thing!" he contradicted querulously. "Red didn't gamble. It was Scotty. Drolluxed, he was, before ever a ship hove in sight. Raised Cain, he did. Lord, how he cussed Aleck! Blamed hisself, too; I swanny, I thought one time he'd go crazy as a bedbug. Sputterin' an' mutterin' an' sayin' over an' over the Proverbs of King Solomon about fools an' their money, an' sich. How Aleck did laugh! Strong man, Aleck was. Scotty was a strong man too, way it turned out. They was all of 'em strong men."

"Scotty knew how to quote Scripture, did he?" remarked Ford.

"Great Sunday-schoolin' he got before he run away an' went to sea. Powerful pious, his folks must 'a' been. Heard him say once that's why he run away. I remember an argyment that got to goin' once. Some o' the men was twittin' him 'bout the way he believed in fortune-tellin' an' all that rigamarole, an' he up an' quoted Bible to 'em. Said it might 'a' been contrary to orders for old Saul to go call on the Witch of Endor, but accordin' to the book, she was the real thing, jest the same. Yessir! I always kinda wondered myself about that Witch of Endor. If she wa'n't really a mejum, how could—"

"Scotty believed in fortune-tellers?"

"Never touched port all the time I knew him, that he wasn't droppin' in on one o' them palm-readers or mejums, or something. Now, I never was superstitious—much. Once there was a stark follered us more'n a week in the—"

"You were telling about how upset Scotty was when he'd lost the pearls."

"Yessir. Aleck laughed. Lord, how mean he could laugh—without no laughin' in it. Then, lo and behold, what did he do but give 'em back to him!"

"Remorse?"

"Remorse, hell!"

"Gran'pa!" expostulated Mrs. Manlove.

"If ye don't like the way I tell it, ye don't have to set an' listen! Strong stories call for strong language. Like the time old Cap'n Ezry Taber was—"

"You said it wasn't remorse, Captain Weed."

"He needed him. They all needed each other. Way things turned out proved it. If them three hadn't stuck together an' bought a schooner an' gone to tradin', where'd they be now?"

"Where would they be?" Coffin asked.

THE old man cleared his throat loudly. "I aint never see nor heard hide nor hair of 'em since I left Wellin'ton," he de-

clared. "Last I ever knew of 'em, there they was, tradin' in the South Seas. Last time I ever see Aleck, he was in a store in Wellin'ton run by a Chinese. Hadn't seen him for a year or more. You knew I stayed in Wellin'ton three or four years after I went there from the Kermadecs, I s'pose."

"No."

"I did. Got me a little business there. Did well, too. Would 'a' stayed there forever, I guess, if I hadn't got sort o' homesick. My wife'd been dead for years, you know, an' Lyddy's mother was married an' settled. Lyddy herself was most grown up. I was doin' real well in Wellin'ton, but there aint no place like home."

"He got rheumatiz," said Mrs. Manlove.

"And you met Aleck in a Chinaman's store," Coffin prodded.

"Buyin' something, he was. I remember how it looked in his hand just as well's if 'twas yest'day. It was one of them yeller linktum-vitty boxes they have out there, with bands an' locks that the devil himself couldn't break into, hardly. He had it in his hand, just payin' the feller for it, an' he says howdy-do real polite, an' I says the same to him, an' that's all we had to say except I asked him, mebbe, how tradin' was, an' how Scotty an' Red was gettin' along. No, come to think of it, I didn't ask after Scotty. Didn't think it would be best, mebbe, the girl bein' with him."

"The girl?"

The old man wagged his head.

"It was a shame," he said. " 'Course, down in those parts you don't expect everybody to go accordin' to the rules that folks foller back here where things is more civilized. Far's 'at's concerned, I've known the same kind o' things to get done round here, except they do 'em sort o' smoother, as ye might say. Goddy, goddy, goddy, but she was a pretty girl! Not more'n seventeen, or mebbe eighteen. She had kinda yeller hair."

"And you didn't ask after Scotty?"

"He might 'a' thought I was bein' personal, an' I never aimed to stir Aleck up. Nobody did. It wasn't a good idee—or to stir up Scotty or Red, either, far's 'at's concerned."

"This girl—"

"Both on 'em wanted her, an' Aleck got her. I guess mebbe it'd be nearer to say he took her. Too bad, it was! Scotty would've married her, so I heard. Aleck—Aleck didn't. He didn't ever get married till he was nearly forty."

"Somewhere there in the South Pacific, I suppose?"

"How should I know? I don't know, to tell the truth an' shame the devil, whether he ever got married at all. He *looked* like one o' these fellers that never gets married till about forty. That's what I said—or meant to, if I didn't. Last I ever knew of him, that yeller-haired girl had died—or suthin'. Anyway, they wa'n't together no more."

"And yet Scotty, who wanted to marry her, still remained in partnership with him."

"He'd better," the old man said. "Aleck needed him. S'pose he let a girl or anything make trouble between 'em, what would Aleck do with that paper? Hey?"

"I don't believe you told us about that paper."

"Didn't I? Didn't I tell 'em about that paper, Lyddy? That's one o' the best jokes I ever see."

MR. WEED chuckled.

"Yes sir, that was a good one, sure as ever you're knee-high to a hop-toad. 'Course, back there on the island, Aleck was afraid mebbe Scotty, bein' so mad over losin', an' sayin' Aleck had took advantage of him, an' all—he was afraid mebbe he'd tell. I don't say's he would; he never seemed to me to be the kind that would squeal on his pardners an' the like o' that. But Aleck couldn't afford to take no chances, could he?"

"But if they both had taken part in the killing?"

"I don't know who done it," Weed cried hastily. "It might 'a' been one an' it might 'a' been t'other. But if Scotty had blabbed on Aleck, an' Aleck had pearls, an' Scotty didn't have none, it would 'a' looked like it was Aleck, wouldn't it? So what does he do after Scotty's been fussin' an' grumpin' a day or two but make him a proposition. Scotty can sign a paper sayin' he's the one that did the actual killin', an' Aleck'll give him his share of the pearls back."

"I should think Aleck would have been afraid Scotty would kill him too, after that, to get the paper."

"That's where he worked it cute. Didn't take no chance of Scotty slippin' a knife into him for it, or mebbe pushin' him overboard on the ship bound for Wellin'ton, while he'd be sure to have it on him. No sir. First along, there on the island, it was jest an agreement by word o' mouth.

Scotty agrees to sign the paper after we get to Wellin'ton, with Red an' me as witnesses, and *then* he gets the pearls. An' after that, they cash in their shares, the three of 'em, an' go into tradin'. Then, the minute the transaction is done, an' Scotty has his pearls an' Aleck his paper, Aleck went an' give it to a banker or hid it or suthin' — I dunno. Anyways, Scotty couldn't get it back by jest killin' him, because he didn't keep it on him, an' Scotty wouldn't gain anything by givin' him his come-uppance an' then mebbe havin' the confession show up. It was slick! I've always said and I always will that Aleck got one on him good. Because, looky here! Aleck would 'a' give him the pearls—some on 'em, anyway—jest to keep his mouth shet without no confession, wouldn't he? He jest talked Scotty into signin' that paper extry. Goddy, but he was a deep one!"

"Did Aleck always keep it? Didn't Scotty ever get it back?"

"How in Sam Hill should I know? Never in my time. What's happened since they got prosperous an' respectable—" He cleared his throat. "If they ever did. *I* never see hide nor hair of 'em since I come away from Wellin'ton, in eighty-six. Never heard of 'em, either." He repeated, with increased emphasis: "Never heard of 'em, an' never wanted to. Figgered I was well shet of 'em. Yes sir."

"It's kinda gettin' along toward his bedtime," Mrs. Manlove suggested. "I like to get him to bed by sunset, and he's got to eat his supper first."

"I go to bed when I get good an' ready!" Mr. Weed declared loudly. He must have thought it better not to have any discussion of this point, however, for he hastily asked, with honeyed amiability: "What ye got good for supper, Lyddy?"

Ford and Coffin rose to go, expressing enjoyment of their call.

"When's this piece goin' to be in the paper? Lyddy'll get one."

"It is a book I'm writing," Coffin said. "It will be some time before it is out. It isn't all written yet, you know. It takes a long time to write a book."

"A year?"

"Perhaps."

"Ye'll want to say I'm ninety-eight, then. An' expectin' to enjoy many happy returns of the day. You can put—"

"There's hot apple sauce, Gran'pa," said Mrs. Manlove.

"Why in thunder don't we have supper, then? . . . . Yes sir, I'll be ninety-eight when that there piece of yourn comes out. . . . . Strong men, they were, but not strong enough to ever live to be ninety-eight, I bet. Not with all their money! They aint one of 'em much over sixty yet, an' nowadays, most folks don't live to be a hundred. Never did, far's 'at's concerned. I never knew a man as old as me. I—"

"They're comin' to see you again sometime, Gran'pa. The biscuits will be gettin' cold."

Mr. Weed, with a spirited gesture, swept the afghan from his knees to a heap in the middle of the floor and indicated he was ready to be assisted to the diningroom.

"Tarnation, Lyddy!" he shouted. "Aint I a-waitin' for ye?"

CHAPTER XIX

AT Coffin's home they set down the ancient's disconnected story, as literally as they could recall it, and when they were agreed that they had omitted nothing, Coffin typewrote it. It was by then too late to get a train for Boston, and Ford went to a hotel. In his room he got out the transcript and studied it carefully. In spots it seemed to illuminate the late tragedy, but in not a single respect was it conclusive. As legal evidence it was worthless, and must remain so. The rambling recollections of a dotard would have no weight in court, even if he could be persuaded to substitute complete names for sobriquets, which plainly he could not; in all his shifting tale, and for all his second-childhood loquacity, he had not once tripped and called one of that trio of strong men by his family name.

Following a method Ford sometimes pursued, to visualize and make concrete the angles of a difficult problem, he set down on paper a summary of his most vital queries. The sheet, when he sat back to survey it, bore these sentences:

Which was Scotty?
Confession:
  Did Scotty ever get it back?
  Did Aleck once keep it in the box?
  Did Scotty, knowing this, try to get box?
  Why, at this late day?
Motive (if not to secure confession):
  Hate or revenge? Again, why wait so many years?
  Sudden quarrel, bringing old hatred to a head. (More probable.)

In absence of motive, no evidence possible without witnesses:
(Did Friday C. or Roger C. witness it?)

He fell into a deep study. Then, after some moments, he leaned forward and added more lines to the sheet:

Gambler.
Weaker of the two.
Good bringing up. (Knew Scripture.)
Mediums. Palmists.

He smiled with sudden inspiration.

"Why, of course!" he exclained mentally. "And with the town gossiping and Bunster asking all sorts of questions about her, there's an excuse for it."

He struck a match and burned the sheet of paper. The earliest morning train bore him to Boston.

TAKING a taxicab to the Adams House, Ford checked his bags there, breakfasted, and went out the rear entrance and through Mason Street to Tremont, where he entered an old-fashioned business block and ascended to the third-floor offices of "J. Ullrich. Entertainers Supplied." Mr. Ullrich, at the request Ford made of him, said: "No. Absolutely! It positively can't be done." At sight of a silver badge and assurance that the law was concerned, although not in any way that was to the lady's discredit or would inconvenience her, he retired strategically from his position. Ford thanked him and made memorandum of an address. He recovered his bags, went to the North Station and checked them to Rockpoint. The train that he boarded did not set him down at Rockpoint, however, but at Salem.

He came, on a quaint, prim street with narrow sidewalks, to a cottage, very old but in excellent repair, and with fresh-painted white clapboards and green blinds, setting only a little way back from a picket fence and swinging gate. There was a strip of flower-garden at one side, bright with well-tended summer bloom. A young woman came to the front door at his ring and showed him into a cool living-room with furniture of the Victorian period and a Rogers statuette in a corner.

"I'll tell her," the girl said, and went back into the hall and to the foot of the stairs.

"Aunt Lizzie!" she called. "A gentleman to see you."

The young woman went off toward the rear of the house. There came, presently, the faint swishing of feminine garments, a light footstep on the stairs, and Madame Bernard entered the room, a satisfying picture, in gray voile with dainty touches of white at throat and wrists, of old-fashioned New England neatness.

"I am Mrs. Brown," she said inquiringly.

He gave her his personal card.

"We have met before, but not formally," said he. "I was in your audience a week ago Monday at Mrs. Joseph Tully Greene's. You hadn't had a chance to meet many of us when the interruption came."

"If it is a matter of business," she told him coldly, still standing, "I would prefer you to see my agent. I never make engagements directly. Here I do not attend to any business affairs. I don't know how you came to find me."

"It is a matter of business, and it isn't," he said. "I dislike to annoy you, but really, I couldn't see any other way. There is something I want to ask you to do. First, I want to tell you my occupation, assuring you at the very beginning that I shall regard whatever conversation we have—and your place of residence here—as a matter of personal confidence. I'd like to speak quite frankly with you, if I may, Mrs. Brown. I am connected with the Boston police department."

SHE looked again at his card and moved a trifle to get him in a better light.

"As a detective, appointed by Commissioner Calder," she added, with a slight smile, "you are the son of Clayton T. Ford and Margaret Lowell Purdy, and you still live in the old house on Beacon Street, and some of your friends can't understand why you don't work at some respectable profession." Her smile broadened. "Not mind-reading, I assure you! It is my business to remember names and faces, even when I see the faces only in pictures in the newspapers." She gestured toward a chair. "Sit down, Mr. Ford." She also took a seat, and waited.

"I have been making some investigations into the death of Mr. Robinson, that night," he said. "I've come to a point where I need a bit of help—highly skilled and specialized help. You can give it, if you will."

"I'll be glad to hear, but if you are thinking that I have any power that everyone else doesn't have—clairvoyance, or anything of that sort—I assure you I haven't. Not in the slightest degree!"

"I felt certain you were telling the exact truth when you announced, in your little opening speech that night, that you were solely an entertainer," he smiled. "No, I didn't call to ask you to delve into the past or the future. But I do want you to undertake an experiment for me that is in line with your—profession."

She noticed the hesitation. "Call it a trade, if you like," she said, pleasantly. "That is what it is—a means to make a living."

"A very excellent living, if what I hear about your recent honorariums is true." He added, sincerely: "If you don't mind my saying so, I think you deserve it. I have listened to quite a number of palmists and card-readers. I have never known one to do the thing so smoothly as you. You have a wonderful skill. I wonder if you would mind telling me—just as one professional guesser to another—how you hit so close to facts there at Greene's the other night. It must have occurred to you that quite a number of things came out very much as you foretold."

"Did they?" she asked. Her face expressed surprise. "I hadn't noticed it. I don't even remember what I told anybody. I use the regulation reading of the cards and lines in the hand, of course, as a foundation, and study my people, and then sort of make it up as I go along, being careful not to say anything unpleasant, and to make it innocent and amusing. What did I say that came out as I predicted?"

"News was coming at night, by water. You were reading cards for Roger Cresson."

"Doesn't news usually come by night at the shore, with all the men in the city daytimes?" she asked. "And with all the yachts and motorboats there are, wouldn't it be pretty safe to predict, almost any time, that news would come by water?"

"You spoke of a *C* and an *R*, in some combination."

SHE smiled. "To a Cresson, engaged to marry a Robinson, who sat right there in the room. Why not?"

"You knew them by sight. Of course!"

"There are very few wealthy people on the North Shore that I don't know either by sight or by their pictures in the Sunday papers. And of course I keep posted on all the gossip about all the families that gets into print. That is part of my business. I have a pretty good memory."

"As you remembered who my father and mother were, and where I live!"

She nodded. "Exactly. If I had read your palm there at Mrs. Greene's, I might have been able to say something that would have seemed quite marvelous, considering you had never seen me before in your life. It might not have occurred to you that I had noticed in the *Herald* that you were on a yachting trip with Whalen Lawrence, and that I have in a collection of pictures up in my room a very good one of you that appeared when Colonel Calder appointed you."

"Simple, isn't it?" he said admiringly. "Nothing whatever but a head like an encyclopedia, an eye like a camera, and a diplomat's ability to talk. Tell me, please," Ford went on seriously, "isn't there a line in the hand that is called 'the murderer's line'?"

"Yes. It has been called that, sometimes, although most works on palmistry define it as a line of ill-fortune. The person who has it must work harder than most people to overcome a tendency toward bad luck. It is a line that extends straight across the palm from left to right without any break. A very rare line, indeed. I have a vague recollection that the books say it occurs only once in two million hands, or some very great number like that. I have never found it in any hand I have ever read."

"In the interest of justice, could you find it in a hand? In any hand, I mean?" She looked grave, and a little startled. "In the interest of justice," he repeated.

"I couldn't be born and brought up in Salem, with my witch-hanging ancestry, without wanting to see justice done," she said. "But I'm old enough not to think I am always competent to decide what justice is. Wont you explain?"

He did, earnestly and at length. She listened, sometimes interrupting, sometimes agreeing, sometimes questioning. In the end she came to a clear decision.

"Telephone me if you arrange it," she said, "and I will do the best I can. I have tomorrow evening clear, and no other evening until after next week, except Sundays."

He rose to go and said, with perfect sincerity, that when the present business was out of the way, he hoped she would allow him to call upon her in his purely personal capacity.

"I shall be glad to see you any time,"

she said, in the doorway. "I've enjoyed your call very much. Did anybody ever tell you that you are very nice to old ladies? If you are as much nicer to young girls as you naturally would be—"

"Yes?" he asked.

"I would risk a real prophecy about you." Her eyes twinkled more merrily than ever. "You will have one happy marriage."

CHAPTER XX

TWO crowded days! Chief Bunster not only had been induced to stand sponsor for a most unusual gathering, but had been convinced the idea was his own. Greene undertook securing permission for it from Hope Robinson, a mere matter of asking; getting her to request Friday Cresson to be there as a representative friend of the family was a more difficult task, for she could not be trusted to ask it ingenuously if she even suspected the meeting's purpose. A long and explicit telegram to Tom Lederer—then a difficult series of conferences with Tommy Hawbaker, who saw no valid objection to taking the lignum-vitæ box from his safe and bringing it with him, and with Fred Story, who violently opposed the whole idea as foolish and futile and only gave in at last because Hawbaker, who had official possession of the box, became angry and stubborn at his opposition and announced his intention of conceding to Ford's suggestion anyway.

Two crowded days to arrange the stage-setting and summon the actors and the audience, not one of whom, with the exception of Madame Bernard, knew the true objective of the plan. Ford did not dare hint it. At best his experiment might easily fail; it all depended upon what control of his emotions its principal subject would be able to exercise under stress of sudden shock.

Came the evening of the second day, and Wade Robinson's library was again open and lighted. The scene was in many respects the same as on that midnight nearly a fortnight before, when substantially this identical company had hastily assembled there; yet the differences were important.

No gruesome figure lay sprawled before the fireplace. Another rug was spread there, unmarred by sanguinary stains. The wall-safe was closed. No pistol lay on the table. Instead, on the corner of it nearest where Robinson had fallen, there rested, its odd natural coloring no longer two-thirds hidden by smudge of red, the lignum-vitæ box. The French window, as on that other night, stood open toward the stony beach and whispering sea.

They waited, with infrequent and low-toned, inconsequential speech,—Tommy Hawbaker, Fred Story, Doctor Silk, Friday Cresson, Joseph Tully Greene, Chief Bunster.

"How is old Jake Crandall tonight, Doctor?" Greene asked.

"He was holding his own this morning. I haven't seen him since; once a day is all I go, now. Doing excellently, I should say. Getting stronger steadily."

"What color did his hair use to be, before it was white—what there is of it?" Ford asked, as one who makes talk to fill in time.

Friday came back from his thoughts.

"I beg pardon?" he murmured. "Oh! Red."

Silence fell again. Somewhere a clock struck eight, and there was a nervous comparison of watches with it. Ford spoke quietly:

"Madame Bernard is in the next room; I thought it would be more satisfactory if she were not here while we discuss what we are going to ask her to do. You all understand, I think, the purpose of our being here. I have arranged the meeting, at Chief Bunster's suggestion, purely as a matter of experiment. Some of us have no particular confidence in such things, and yet I imagine we all feel that we have no right to overlook any possibility. We are all familiar with the predictions that were made by Madame Bernard at Mr. Greene's house, just before the murder. Some of us were present, and those of us who were not have heard the comment about it. It was impossible, of course, that the lady could have any cognizance of what was going to happen so soon after—any cognizance, I mean, that came from natural sources of knowledge. I do not pretend to say whether she had cognizance of any sort. Personally, I have never especially believed in such powers as she is reputed to have; and yet nobody, in this day, can deny that there are psychic phenomena that are not easily explained."

He smiled deprecatingly.

"I am not attempting to give a lecture on psychology, or any angle of it," he said.

"It merely seemed well to summarize our reasons for being here. All of us, I imagine, have felt that the unexplained presence with Mr. Robinson's body of this little box might have some connection with his death. Some people contend that in the hands of persons possessing the necessary power, an inanimate object can sometimes convey a message. The experiment we are to undertake is to place the box in Madame Bernard's hands, here in the room where it was associated with crime, and ask her to give us any impressions she may receive, or claim to receive."

THERE was the sound of a fast-driven automobile coming to a brake-squealing stop before the house, and footsteps on the front veranda.

"We have been waiting for one or two persons," Ford said, and every man in the room except Greene looked up at him inquiringly, they having supposed the company was complete. "I think they are here. If not, we shall have to wait a little longer."

Greene had gone to the front door. Now he ushered into the room Detective Lederer and Roger Cresson.

"Good evening. We were afraid you were going to be late," Ford said. Young Cresson let his eyes take in all the gathering and rest finally upon his father. He did not speak.

"Tire trouble twice between Boston and here," Lederer explained.

"This is Mr. Lederer," Ford announced. "He is connected with our department."

"What's this?" demanded Friday Cresson. "Roger! You're not—" He did not finish the question, but Ford answered it:

"Oh, no. Mr. Lederer happened to be over in New York, where your son was visiting, and as I had Mr. Cresson's address, I asked Lederer to urge him to be here with us tonight, and to do whatever he could to expedite his getting here."

"Very good of you, I'm sure," Friday said, and turned to his son: "Did you get our business finished?"

"Not entirely," replied the youth with constraint. "It's going along fairly well."

The elder Cresson nodded, and switched his eyes to Ford. "Is there anything further to delay us?" he asked.

"Nothing," Ford told him, and spoke to Greene: "Will you be good enough to ask Madame Bernard to come in? Sit down, Mr. Cresson. Sit down, Tom."

MADAME BERNARD came quietly in, inclined her head to greet them all, and faced them beside the fireplace. She was all in black, and there was in her manner none of the whimsical friendliness that was so delightful a part of her public appearances. She looked inquiringly and seriously at Ford. He indicated his lignum-vitæ box.

"Here is a somewhat unusual box, Madame Bernard," he said. "Is there anything that you can tell us about its associations with the recent tragedy?"

"I can try," she answered quietly. She took it in her hands. "It is heavy," she said, "very heavy for a box that is almost empty—but not quite."

"Wonderful!" Story whispered in Hawbaker's ear. "He has already told her there is one piece of paper in it."

She stood holding the box before her, her eyes fixed upon it. Her eyelids drooped. A full moment passed—two. She began to speak in a low voice:

"A distant country—a city by the sea—strange workmen, yellow workmen, with chattering, clacking tongues. A queer, outlandish shop, with strange smells—spices, drugs, odors of the Orient. . . . . A street outside the shop—breezes, and more odors, different odors: tar, oakum, fish, a salt tang in the wind. . . . . A house—a hiding-place. The lock turned secretly, paper thrust in—secretly, all secretly."

Her voice came to a stop. Her eyelids fell still lower, and her fragile body swayed a little. They were all watching her curiously; something in her restrained but vibrant tones tingled the nerves of even the sophisticated Story, who saw the whole thing as a silly trick, even though he could not guess its purpose.

Again, after a time, speech, lower-toned, hesitant, halting, as though the mind that dictated it were groping with difficulty in dark places:

"The paper. . . . . No blood on it, but blood *in* it. . . . . It says: 'I killed him.' . . . . To steal. Envy—covetousness! A knife-thrust. . . . . There are names on the paper—scrawled names, faded, old, three of them. Not easy to make out!" The woman's face set, in the sharp light of the electric bulbs directly before her, into tense, tortured lines; the effort she was putting forth seemed to call for every resource of physical strength, as well as mental. And then words came, as though from far away, but with a rush:

"Cresson. Crandall. Weed. Ah-h-h!"

It was a sigh of infinite weariness. Madame Bernard's eyes opened, and she set the box hastily back on the table and stroked her forehead and temples.

"Quick!" she cried. "While I am still strong enough. I need the psychic waves. I must touch each hand. One of them may give me the thought that I cannot seem to grasp—the thought that goes with this picture of the box as it was years and years ago. Quick!"

SHE seized Ford's hand and held it a second, with a grasp that trembled violently. She dropped it and turned to Doctor Silk, who was next nearest, and his hand she also gripped and let fall. She fluttered toward Roger Cresson,—whose eyes, at her mention of his name, had widened with a horror that he could not conceal,—but whirled before she reached him, as though in response to some impulse outside her own volition, and stretched her palm commandingly toward his father.

Friday Cresson turned, hesitated almost imperceptibly, and extended his hand. She grasped it from the back, turned it quickly over, and bent her eyes upon the palm. Her frail body stiffened. There was a sharp intake of breath, a shudder that even the skeptical Story knew to be real, and she gasped:

"Oh-h-h! It is there! *The murderer's line!*"

"No, no! Stop! Wait!" Roger Cresson, on his feet, shouted protest. "He couldn't! He couldn't!"

"Sit down, Roger."

Friday Cresson commanded him, quite in his usual voice, and the youth obeyed, compelled by his father's calmness. Friday turned his cold gaze back to Madame Bernard, who had recoiled and now leaned limply against a corner of the fireplace.

An appreciable moment Friday surveyed her; then he sneered:

"Magnificent nonsense! I congratulate you. You are a clever actress."

Ford, who had been holding his breath, let it expire with a sigh. The test had been made—and it had failed.

Friday Cresson turned to him:

"I am surprised at you, Mr. Ford, if you are responsible for this. Rather cheap theatricalism for a man of your intelligence. Of course I appreciate that you have read that old confession which was under the false bottom of that box. I couldn't deny my signature if I wanted to. Why all this claptrap about it?"

STORY was on his feet. "False bottom? Open it!" he cried.

"The key is at the Interstate Trust," stammered Hawbaker. "How—when—a false bottom!"

Friday Cresson smiled faintly. "You do not seem to have taken these others into your confidence," he said to Ford. "They weren't aware of the peculiarities of that box."

"What does this mean?" demanded Roger. "She said it confessed a murder. Father! You don't mean that—"

If he completed the sentence, they lost it in their sudden attention to noises on the side veranda. There were heavy, confused steps, the reiterated sound of something dragged, a man's voice, muffled, grating, insistent, a woman's voice, high-pitched, worried, protesting.

In the French window, wavering, panting, leaning heavily on his frightened housekeeper, stood Jacob Crandall. His feet were slippered and his ankles bare; an old red bathrobe but partially hid a flapping nightgown.

"He *would* come," she began to explain, half in tears. "He saw the light over here, and nothin' would do but—oh, dear!"

Quite disregarding her, the old man's gaze traveled about the room.

"Before I die," he quavered, the words twisted raucously by his paralysis. "It comes like a thief in the night. Can't wait. Before I die."

Doctor Silk was at his side.

"You are not going to die," he said. "But heavens, man! You musn't do this. I don't know how you could. Why didn't you"—to Mrs. Bling—"send for help?"

"There wa'n't nobody to send. I couldn't leave him. He said he'd come alone if I didn't help him. He'd have fallen down and—"

CRANDALL was not listening. His eyes had focused on Lyman Cresson. Slowly his trembling hand went up and pointed.

"He!" he accused. "He did it. Scotty Cresson. I—I saw him."

Cresson was the most unruffled man in the room.

"Better sit down, Red, old man," he advised. "There's plenty of time."

Silk and Hawbaker, with Bunster hovering, were letting Crandall down into an armchair; he was trying to peer past them toward Cresson, and mumbling. Friday went on, to him, conversationally, soothingly:

"Take it easy. We'll get it all straightened out. Don't do that!"—as Crandall in his agitation struggled to rise. "It isn't good for you. Look at me. I'm not showing excitement, am I? I can't. You didn't know, Jake, that I have a two-hundred-and-sixty blood-pressure. I have. And *angina pectoris*. When I go, I'll go like a shot, and any excitement is likely to do it. I thought, a week ago last Monday night, I wouldn't last till morning. But you, if you take care of yourself, ought to last a long time. Take it easy, Jake. Don't try to talk. I'll tell it myself."

Crandall seemed not to understand. His eyes had singled out Ford as the one who had discerned his purpose when he sought to give them a message by means of his Bible, and he looked at him, his finger again waving toward Cresson.

"Esau!" he whispered. "Esau!"

"Yes, Mr. Crandall," Ford said. "Steady! We know. He sold his birthright for a mess of—pearls."

Cresson turned on Ford a look that savored of respect.

"As I recall it," he said, "pearls were not mentioned in that confession; there were good and sufficient reasons why they should not be. I am a little puzzled. You have been away a few days."

"At New Bedford," Ford told him.

Cresson nodded. "That is where you would get track of it, if anywhere, I should suppose. But I thought not a soul was alive but Jake who knew. It couldn't have been Weed; he must be dead long ago. He'd be at least a hundred by now. He must have left a confession of his own—or told some relative, perhaps."

"What is all this?" demanded Story. "Do you admit what Crandall says? Did you kill Wade Robinson?"

"I did."

ROGER CRESSON groaned and dropped his face in his hands.

"Why?" asked Hawbaker.

"Because I hated him," declared Cresson quietly, but his voice was bitter with venom. "Because I had hated him for nearly forty years. He made me rich—and I hated him. He always knew it. It pleased him to dominate men who hated him. He was never afraid of man or the devil."

"He told me." It was Crandall who spoke. "He told me—in a letter. Ten years ago—fifteen. I—I don't know how long ago. I have been sick, sometimes, I think. I can't remember. He told me in a letter. I gave it back to him when— I don't remember just when. It was after I had no more dealings with him—except to try to save him, as I had been saved. I found it in some old papers and gave it to him."

"I knew it must have been you," said Cresson. "If he had spelled out my name instead of merely using the initial, this thing would have been over sooner, and with less strain on everybody." He seemed conscious for the first time of Roger's mental anguish. "Don't take it so hard, son," he said, a softer note in his voice than any of them had ever heard in it. "Your father was pretty bad—a good many years ago, it was, and perhaps there was some excuse; but you had the best woman in the world for your mother. You are more like her than you are like me, thank God!" The boy did not raise his head. "Why did you run away, Roger?"

The youth tried to speak and choked.

"He knew," Ford told his father.

Friday nodded slightly, twice.

"I wondered," he said. "How?"

"You heard Crandall talking, and walked toward the Neck Road," said Ford to Roger. "While you were going away from here, with your back to the house, your father came in. You turned, there at the beginning of the Neck, where you could keep an eye on the lighted entrance, and waited for Crandall to come out. Is that right?"

"Yes," the boy admitted.

"And your father came out instead. Then you came back, intending to have your talk with Mr. Robinson. Did you look into the room and see him, or did you hear Harper call?"

"Harper," said Roger, miserably. "Just as I got to the piazza! He shouted: 'Help! Mr. Robinson's been killed!' I walked half the night."

"Good son!" his father said softly, in approbation.

"But why?" Story again demanded. "Why, after having it in for him for years but still sticking with him— How did you come to kill him at last?"

"That," said Friday, "is a matter of no importance."

"Charity!" faltered Jake Crandall. "I knew all about them of old. I never told. I hoped they would see the light, as I had. My own sins were washed away. There was hope for Scotty and Aleck."

"Aleck?" questioned Hawbaker.

"He dropped his first name when he came back from New Zealand," Ford explained. "His birth-record shows he was christened Alexander Wade Robinson."

"IT was so long ago, that killing of the Frenchman with the pearls," Crandall muttered. "It was charity to let time take its course. They might find the right path. I tried to lead them. Charity! 'Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and have not charity—' I saw it. I heard it. I heard Aleck laugh and curse him, and turn to put the box back, and I saw him take up the pistol—"

He stopped, breathless. Doctor Silk felt his pulse and murmured soothingly.

"Why did he curse him?" Story asked. "Why did Aleck curse him?"

"Jake! Red! Please!" protested Friday Cresson, but if the other heard, he paid no heed.

"I had just left here. I was here to—Why was I here? Did I come to tell him about 'a certain rich man?' "

"Never mind. You had left—"

"I had got to the sumach. There were footsteps back here on the piazza. I saw Scotty."

"When you say Scotty, you mean Lyman Cresson."

"Why is it necessary, Mr. Story? Why?" cried Cresson. "I admit it. I hated him. He had a confession of mine to a murder years ago. I saw a chance to get it. I killed him. I couldn't get it, because the box—" He bit his lower lip before he went on, still calmly: "I couldn't take the box. It was—I couldn't take it."

"Father!" Roger's voice was appealing. "Twice you've said you confessed to a murder years ago, but you haven't said you did it. Did you? Had you killed a man, before you married my mother?"

"No, Roger," said Cresson. "I was with him, but Robinson did it. And I signed a paper that I did it, because—because I believed he would kill me if I didn't, principally, and also because I wanted money. Mr. Ford said it a little while ago: I sold my birthright for a mess of pearls."

"Cresson," mumbled Crandall, as though nothing had been said since Story's question. "Lyman Cresson, Scotty. We called him Scotty at sea. Scotch father. We called him Scotty."

"Yes. And you say you saw him come here?"

Crandall trembled more violently at the recollection. "Something made me slip out across the lawn to where I could look in," he said. "I don't know why. I—I think I haven't always had good reasons; I have been a little peculiar at times. I don't seem to remember. Was I peculiar, Doctor?"

"You are going to be better now," Doctor Silk promised. "Hurry and tell it. We want to get home and in bed again."

"Scotty had some papers. They talked—business. Just a few words. Then Aleck asked him a question, so low I couldn't hear. And Scotty said: 'I meant it. It's a piece of dirty business, and I wont do it.' Aleck said something more, and Scotty said: 'What I told you in the office this afternoon goes. We've put over some pretty rotten deals, but this is the worst. I'm through.' So Aleck laughed. I've heard him laugh like that on the deck of the schooner, when—"

"JUST as few words as we can," urged Doctor Silk. "We'll be getting so tired we can't finish it if we don't tell it quickly."

"And Aleck says: 'What I told *you* this afternoon goes, too.' And Scotty told him: 'You wouldn't dare.' Then Aleck laughed again, loud. And he says: 'I have. I told her tonight after dinner. We'll see whether you can stand up to me and tell me what you will do and what you wont! I told her she couldn't marry him, and when it comes out and they ask me why, I'm going to tell them the son of Lyman Cresson isn't a fit person for her to marry. I'll tell them I just got hold of that confession. I'll tell them I've just found out he's the son of a murderer.' "

Roger Cresson moaned and his father said, helplessly: "Can't we spare him this?"

"Then Scotty cursed him. Oh, horribly! And they both shouted at once. And Aleck ran to the safe and came back waving that little box. 'I've got it in there,' he screamed, 'and by God, you'll do what I say as you always have, or I'll advertise him and you, too.' He was in one of his

rages, you know. And he turned to put the box back in the safe, and it happened. Scotty hollered: 'You stole one—' "

"Oh, Jake! *No!*" cried Friday.

" 'You stole one woman from me, and I was coward enough not to kill you for it, but you'll never steal this woman from my boy!' And he beat him down. The pistol crunched. Aleck never spoke. Before the judgment, with his sins as scarlet upon him! It crunched!"

"There, there," soothed the Doctor. "It's all right now. We'll get home pretty soon."

Cresson laid his head back in the big chair. "I had rather you hadn't heard that, Roger," he said. "It doesn't sound good to the son of your mother. But listen, boy! The girl he stole was a good girl—until he stole her. I wanted to marry her. It was more than ten years before I ever saw your mother, you know. Don't forget, Roger, that I loved your mother. And I was as good a husband to her as I knew how to be. You take after your mother. And Hope is a good girl. She takes after her mother, too."

He sighed wearily and closed his eyes. "It's a relief to have it over, at last," he murmured.

"We must put him under arrest," Tommy Hawbaker said, low-voiced, on the other side of the room.

CHIEF BUNSTER, who had sat more dazed by each successive development, spoke for the first time since eight o'clock:

"Don't you worry, Tommy! He's been under arrest ever since Ford an' me got here, only he didn't know it."

"If we had for one moment realized that Roger didn't get back here until after the murder—" the district attorney began.

"There was no way we could know that," Story defended.

"You have talked to Frank Paolino and his father," Ford reminded him. "Did they mention that they met Chief Bunster after they reached the village?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"It takes a slow car not more than twelve minutes to go from here to that spot. Not more than twelve minutes before the Paolinos met Bunster, they had met Lyman Cresson, going away from this house, and then Roger coming toward it. And since then, the murder had been discovered, Harper had taken time to make sure he was dead, had gone to Greene's for help, returned here and telephoned the police station, and Bunster had notified Doctor Silk, got his car and was on his way. All that couldn't have taken less than ten minutes, and there wasn't one chance in a hundred that the murderer could have got here, killed him and made his escape in the remaining minute or two."

"Very easy to figure—now," scoffed Story. "Perhaps you will claim you suspected his father all the time."

"Not all the time," Ford assured him pleasantly, "—only since he told us, three times in two minutes, the night of the murder, that although he hadn't seen the box for years, he was positive there was nothing of importance in it."

"Do you feel ill, Mr. Cresson?"

Tom Lederer, as he spoke, leaned forward in his chair toward Friday. He called, sharply: "Oh, Doctor!"

Silk was across the room in four strides. He lifted a hand that lay on the leather chair-arm; it dropped inert. He hastily listened at the heart. He straightened up, and nodded affirmation to the question they all had thought and no one had asked.

"With *angina* they often go that way," he said. "It is very merciful."

RALEIGH FORD, a half-hour later, finished giving Dick Bailey a hurried summary of the evening's events, and escorted Madame Bernard to the automobile in which he was to take her home. It was the first moment they had had together out of earshot of others.

"My conscience troubles me for having got you into such a scene," he told her, earnestly. "We expected it to be more or less harrowing, of course, but nobody could have foreseen it would be like it was. The strongest of us were shaken; you must be terribly so. You did wonderfully, Mrs. Brown. Cresson was right when he said you would have made a great actress. I knew exactly what was coming, when you accused him, and yet it thrilled me way down to my shoes."

She shivered a little and drew the collar of her coat closer about her neck, although the night was warm.

"But he had it," she said, in her voice a hushed tremolo of awe. "He really had it. The murderer's line! It was there—deep and clear—from one side to the other, straight across his right hand!"

THE END.

Inyoko

A vivid drama of native life as it is lived in the African jungle

By Robert Stewart Davis

HIS earliest remembrance was the death of his co-mother Bomba. Shrieking, she broke through the six-foot grass into the village clearing, and as the people crowded around her, became unconscious and died, almost before the snake-bite on her leg had swollen. It was his first vivid fear, and it was long before he could nerve himself to venture even near the ring of grass which surrounded the village.

But his attention was considerably diverted from this event by the extreme pain he was enduring. His father, being a prominent citizen, possessed of three wives, two ornate hunting-knives and half a dozen chickens, considered that his eldest son should start life properly with his genealogy cicatriced on his face and body. So now he was being carefully cut in various places, and the cuts cupped to leave high, raised scars; afterwards his teeth would be filed to points, so that there could be no mistake as to his tribe.

He lived in a village of fifty grass houses set on a low hill, a quarter of a mile from a deep, swift, hundred-yard-wide river, which was fringed with huge trees bearing a network of lianas. Far as the eye could reach, were hills covered with the coarse, yellowing grass; between them ran forest-lined streams, clear and distinct under the eternal heat-haze of the tropics. An occasional malufa palm grew in the open country, never in the forest; and these provided butter from their nuts and drink from their sap.

The village lay a few degrees below the equator, where summer was unending and the years marked only by the coming of the rainy season. It was in the Congo Basin and rimmed on the east by the Ruwenzori Range.

INYOKO'S skin was light chocolate in color and smooth and satiny in luster, for he belonged to the Bantu race, not the true black negro. His forehead was high, and his nose had a bridge. These features, together with an expressive pair of wide-set brown eyes, made him one of the handsomest boys in the village, though until he

became a big boy, he dispensed with clothes entirely. Then his mother provided him with a piece of grass cloth, the size of a small towel, which he wore as an abbreviated skirt and was thus fully clothed like any other man.

He was equipped with a skull that baffled the strongest rays of a sun that kills white men. His race had almost reached immunity from malaria and dysentery, and he was perfectly capable of digesting almost anything; but even so, there remained quite a number of virulent diseases, so that he was often sick.

His father was his ideal: a great, fierce man, who had gained his start in life by killing a leopard with his bow and arrow. This feat had at once given him an assured standing, for with such weapons the leopard has at least an even chance of being the winner of the fight. Naturally, a leopard-skin is very highly esteemed and is worth an able-bodied man-slave or a specially desirable wife; as a matter of fact, his father's leopard-skin had bought his mother.

From his father he learned of hunting, how to make a bow and how to make arrows with delicate feathered rifling on the shank to make them carry true, how to snare birds and field-mice. And he learned much of the habits of game, together with the fear of the great animals which his people, with their crude weapons, had not conquered—the elephant, the lion and many others which were still able to claim a draw in the war with man.

FINALLY Inyoko became a big boy, in another year he would be a warrior. The duty of the big boys was to go with the women to the village field of manioc, to guard them and to see that the little children did not stray into the jungle. There was no such thing as security in his life. Their field was surrounded on three sides by the high, dense grass, from which frequently glided six-foot puff-adders or even more dangerous, the venomous little foot-long coral snake. On the fourth side a forest of enormous trees grew for a hundred yards on each side of a little creek—a dark, almost impenetrable forest, thick with high underbrush and a maze of vines.

Kakesse, a girl of Inyoko's own age, was working near the edge of the clearing. Of course, women were not the equals of men in any way, and he properly looked down upon them, considering them merely as a desirable form of property, useful for the production of food. They did the drudgery of the village. Their fathers sold them, and their husbands were their masters; but he had noticed, strangely enough in spite of all this, the men did the heaviest work, such as dragging in timbers for the houses and building them. Also the men often accepted the counsel of the women. He had begun to realize dimly that women were something of a riddle. However, Kakesse he considered to be different from the rest, and he was willing to talk and play with her as a special condescension; but she complicated matters by insisting on treating him as an inferior, for she had been chosen to become the sixth wife of Pandulu, the great medicine-man of the village.

PANDULU, the whole village was agreed, had powers beyond their conception and knew all that was to be known, including the secret of the drum telegraph, which carries the news of Africa.

Only the day before, they had become involved in an argument concerning their relative superiorities, that became loud enough to attract their mothers' attention, with the result that both were spanked. It was not only a terrible indignity for a man almost old enough to be a warrior to be spanked by a woman; but Pandulu was offended and might cause unnamable terrors to visit him.

Inyoko intended to keep strictly away from Kakesse to avoid giving any further reason for the mysterious and awful revenge of Pandulu; but when he saw the light chocolate-colored beauty of Kakesse, enhanced, as it was, by a veritable bodice of the most chic cicatrization imaginable, he began, with great care, to stalk a bird in such a manner that he would eventually arrive close to her.

He had almost accomplished his object when he saw the head of a boa-constrictor mounting slowly and silently at Kakesse's back. Unlike the others, this, the largest of the snakes, does not bite. Its nose, hard as iron, is a fist backed by a three-hundred-pound arm of lightning-swift muscle. Its blow stuns the victim. Then it is crushed in the coils of the snake and swallowed. Instinctively, Inyoko shot an arrow at the reptile and came close enough to divert its attention to himself. Four feet above the ground, the malignant head swung to face him with a swift glide toward him, all the

more portentous for its ghastly silence. Paralyzed with fear, he saw the sinister metallic glint of the scales in the sunlight as the serpent swayed and slid forward faster than a running man. He lost the power to run; but shot his arrows in a stream. The narrow, shifting neck and head seemed an impossible mark. The battering-ram nose struck him on the leg. But his last steel-tipped arrow had struck through the throat to the spinal cord. The force of the blow was broken; and he was able to crawl away.

Kakesse ran to him, seized him and helped him, while his mother was running toward them. The rest filled the air with shrill cries of fear, while they danced about at a safe distance. Then they saw that the huge snake was not following, but was writhing in its death-agony, and their cries changed to a pean of triumph. It was now that he received the name that would be his henceforth: Inyoko, the snake.

He was among the first to go up and beat it, cautiously, at arm's-length, with a hoe, till by the time the men, attracted by the noise, had arrived from the village, there was no doubt whatever that the snake was dead. However, each man, as he came, killed it over again to be perfectly satisfied in his own mind. Then with shouts of joy and triumph the men bore it to the village, where it was promptly cut up and eaten.

Inyoko pegged out the skin to dry and thus became a man of property—not much, it is true, for a snake-skin is not very highly esteemed, but a good start, which a brave man such as he would soon add to. In fact, Inyoko became so puffed up under the universal praise showered upon him that he showed signs of bursting.

THAT night the whole village gathered around a great fire; the drums were heated till the heads were taut. Inyoko was acclaimed a full warrior, though it would be another year before he would reach the proper age. By tribal law Kakesse should have become his property, for he had saved her life—the only exception to the usual custom of purchase; but Pandulu would not agree to this, claiming that she was already promised to him and that part payment had been made in the form of warding off evil spirits from her whole family.

The loud general argument over this nice legal point died out as the rubbing of the drums became louder and everyone fell under the hypnotic spell of the drunken rhythm which came before jazz. Dying down to a scarcely audible undertone punctuated by the raucous, staccato "Yah—yah—yah!" metronome of the dancers, the drums were rubbed till their resounding thunder rolled back from the distant hills. Then came a swaying dance that seemed to enter the very souls of the contorted, slowly revolving human ring. Some danced of war, some of sensual love: from each stood forth his deepest naked passion. It was nearly sunrise when the exhausted dancers fell asleep almost before they reached their grass huts.

Scarcely was Inyoko asleep before his sixth sense of the jungle brought him wide awake, instinct with impending danger. Dimly he saw crouching over him a horrid, unbelievable form unlike any man or animal. The fear which seized him now was different from any that he had known before: bred in the fiber of the race was the fear of the supernatural. Always, everyone had spoken with bated breath of demons and goblins that came in the night to torture defenseless humans. The people firmly believed that they were surrounded by a horde of malignant spirits, which caused their sicknesses and misfortunes. Sometimes it was possible to ward them off by incantations. Sometimes, on the other hand, a maleficent specter actually appeared before a man: this was the utterly hopeless case; that man was thoroughly destroyed.

Inarticulate, it was instinct alone that stiffened his every muscle to a deathlike rigidity and which threw his body into a straight line. As he moved, *it* touched him, and a burning pain shot through his side. The pain galvanized him into action, released his brain from coma. He jerked to his feet. The noxious apparition almost enfolded him. Dripping with the sweat of fear, his slippery body broke away. Somehow he dived through the mat covering the entrance and gave out an ear-splitting shriek of pain and fright. Running and still yelling, he was about to plunge into the man-high grass, when a sudden vivid picture of the death of Bomba came to him. He turned and silently raced around the village back of the grass houses, seeking a hiding-place from the supernatural terror that would surely find him.

His cries had wakened the people, who were running about seeking the cause of

the disturbance. The fires were rekindled, and he rushed to the light. Pandulu was questioning his father. All crowded up to see him. He was bleeding from a long cut in his side. As he gasped out his story, the people drew away in fear, and Pandulu began weird conjuration to protect them from the spirits.

His mother led him to their hut and bound his wound. Kakesse followed, but his mother drove her away. They were the only ones sufficiently unswayed by fear to venture near him.

After a time, his father, accompanied by Pandulu, entered the house. Pandulu bore a small gourd filled with a draught over which he made the incantations of healing, then offered it to Inyoko.

This time his mother, daughter of a former medicine-man and far wiser than the rest of the tribe, saved him. She took the gourd, and bending over Inyoko so that the others could not see, swiftly poured the contents on the ground before holding the gourd to her son's lips.

WHEN they were alone, she told her suspicions of Pandulu, and told him what little she had learned from her father of the secrets of the medicine-men. She warned him to give up all claim to Kakesse and make his boa-constrictor skin a peace-offering to Pandulu; otherwise, the arts of the medicine-man would surely cause his death.

He was greatly relieved to find that it was a man that he had to fear and not spirits, and proposed that his mother and Kakesse should run away from the village with him. She quickly showed him that any such idea was not possible, for man could only cope with the great beasts by protecting himself in villages. They three would be eaten by lions or leopards in the open jungle. If they went to another village of their own tribe, they would be enslaved. If they went to the village of another tribe, he would be eaten and the women enslaved.

However, Inyoko was brave-hearted and had reached the age of self-confidence; and so, black as was the outlook, he refused to make his peace with Pandulu. He could form no plan for destroying Pandulu, for the medicine-man did not leave the village, and he knew that if he should, by any chance, fight or ambush, succeed in killing him, he himself would die at the hands of the tribe.

THREE times in the next week, Inyoko narrowly escaped poisoning, and once an arrow was shot into the hut where he should have been lying, recovering from his wound; but most important, Kakesse had stolen in to ask him to save her from Pandulu. She was able to remain but a few minutes for fear of discovery; but in those few minutes they plighted their troth, and he bound the bargain with his only property. He gave her the boa-skin, to be given to her father as payment. They knew that the question of the disposal of Kakesse would be brought before the chief of the village for judgment, and they were old enough to know that justice, in their village, was guided by influence. They had but little to oppose Pandulu, who was the mouthpiece of the chief; so they decided that if Inyoko lost his case, they would run away from the village. With the happy short-sight of youth, they had no idea where they could go or how they could protect themselves; but they had decided that anything was better than being separated.

For years the village had been fortunate; crops had never failed, and the great animals had taken a light toll from the people. There had been no war nor great pestilence, though there was always sickness and occasional fights with surrounding tribes. The people were well contented, and so there was no chance for Inyoko to join a dissatisfied party and either overthrow Pandulu's party or start a separate village. No feasible method of attack on Pandulu could he reach, and it was only the remembrance of Kakesse's visit that kept him from utter hopelessness.

Pandulu, having failed to remove Inyoko from the path to Kakesse during the week, brought the matter of her disposal to public trial before the great chief of the village. It would be decided on the following night.

That day the jungle took toll. Inyoko's father with two other hunters, had started in the morning and had trailed an antelope till, excited by the nearness of the quarry, they had relaxed their caution. Without the slightest warning a lion had jumped them. Inyoko's father the lion had eaten. The others, badly mangled, had managed to reach the village, where one of them died. The thorn-bush wall around the village was feverishly strengthened that day while the light lasted. That night huge

fires were kept burning, lest lions should attack the village itself. Inyoko wildly mourned his father that night; but an even greater sorrow was to befall him next day.

THE river, a quarter of a mile from the village at its nearest point, curved in a mile-wide half-circle below. Then it cut a gorge through the hill, where its hundred-yard width was compressed to a scant thirty yards and the waters swirled through, roaring and white-capped. The roar of the rapids was a constant undertone in the noises of the village and gave them a feeling of confidence. It was their fortification against attack by the river tribes. They were a hunting tribe and knew nothing of canoes, neither their making nor their handling. They did not have means, even, for crossing the river at their door.

Hitherto no canoe of the river tribes had been able to get through the rapids to the river above. The river men were raiders, stealers of women, possibly able to fight well in their boats against other river men, but not in the least to be feared on land; and the swift-running hunters had easily caught and killed them when once before they had attempted to raid the village after landing below the rapids.

The women carried the water of the village from the river in gourds, balanced on their heads, and washed the grass cloth, woven fine as a Panama hat, which formed their scant clothing, at a smooth shelving rock that dipped into the water. They always went there in a crowd with much noise, and threw clods into the water to scare away crocodiles. Once a woman, standing knee-deep talking to the others, had screamed and disappeared under the water.

THIS day, when the women were filling their gourds, they were suddenly surrounded by a horde of the small black men of the river. Men with small legs and large arms, their faces grotesque with a series of great raised scars from tip of nose to top of forehead, the wool clipped close except for a high topknot. The women were quickly overpowered and carried to a great war-canoe, sixty feet long, fashioned from a single tree-trunk. This much Kakesse saw, for she was the only one to escape. Smaller and quicker than the rest, she managed to slip through the cordon back to the village.

The warriors rushed across the bend in the river, but the canoe was swift, and when they reached the rapids, it was shooting through. The river men were pitting their skill against death; the least miscalculation in that churning torrent would be enough to swamp or overturn their craft, which, burned out of a heavy tropical tree, would sink like a stone. Overloaded, the white-water wave-tops boiled over the sides; but before the warriors were close enough to reach their enemies with arrows, the big canoe had won through, and the river men were paddling away faster than men could follow them. The hopeless chase was given up, and the men returned to a village that held only half a dozen women—what few had not gone to the river.

INYOKO had lost his mother. He returned to the deserted grass hut which had been his home. It held only things to remind him of his lost father and mother. His father's ceremonial headdress hung on the wall. In the middle stood the weaving-frame with a half-finished piece of grass cloth that his mother had just now been weaving. The warrior was lost in the little boy, that, crumpled up in a corner, was crying his heart out.

The village of the river men was six days' journey down the stream, and the route lay through the land of another hostile tribe. It would be impossible for this one village to fight its way through, and it was not likely that the king of the tribe would consider a war against both the river men and the intervening tribe, especially as it was not possible to reach the latter; for they, having gained their object, would simply get into their boats and move, if it should become necessary.

There was a long discussion among the warriors, but no satisfactory plan for the recovery of the women resulted. It was broken up by the noise of elephants passing close to the village. The elephant is king of the jungle, and man can only overcome him by traps. Therefore, it was only when the herd had passed by that the men came out to see what they had done. When they came to the village manioc-field, they saw the wide swath of broken-down trees through which the great beasts had entered the field from the forest. Then they saw that the field had been made a playground and had not only been trampled but had been uprooted and utterly de-

stroyed. It was a ruined community. Their women were irretrievably lost, and they would face famine in less than a month. Slowly they straggled back to the village. There was no heart in them for further plans.

Only Pandulu was not overcome by the disasters of the day. He began incantations and continued till all were gathered about him. In the stage setting Pandulu gave himself, which, he well knew, evoked all the superstitious fears of his followers, he was a great orator. His natural gift was enhanced by the years of experience during which his living and his safety had depended on his ability to arouse fear. Fear was his entire stock in trade. It brought him, next to the chief, the best food, the best cloth, the best skins, the best wives. He had learned to play like a musician on the fears, instinct in a people whose civilization was just emerging from savagery, who were able to exist in the world only at the price of eternal vigilance.

WHEN Pandulu announced that the spirits had been offended and demanded a sacrifice, he had already brought Inyoko from his hut. He had brought everyone in the village around him—an inner circle of warriors and an outer circle of the few remaining women with the children. He had done it by his power to arouse fear, and he held them now, gasping and fearful. He told them that the boa-constrictor, killed in the manioc-field, had carried a powerful spirit, that the friends of that spirit had come and killed the offender's father, that the village had not atoned and so the offender's mother was taken away, and with her, the other women. Even then the village had done nothing, and the spirits had destroyed their food. Now, if no sacrifice were made, swift and terrible death would come to each and every one of them.

It was easy to see that he had carried his audience to a height of fear beyond all reason. He had played upon them till their only thought was instant execution of his desires. Few, even, were able to recognize that Inyoko was to be the victim. Their minds were in an emotional fog through which they were unable to see.

Two there were who remained beyond the spell which he had thrown upon the village. Inyoko, the intended sacrifice, saw that all this was his private feud with Pandulu. Cold, murderous rage seized him, as his enemy charged him with his father's death, his mother's abduction and the misfortunes of the village. His family was gone. He stood alone. The people of the village were against him. His rage bore him above any fear of spirits or men. He rose above the level of his race, as Mauto-Yanvo rose to the control of an empire with his army of fear-deadened hemp-smokers.

KAKESSE saw that her lover was to be sacrificed, so that she should become the bride of an old and repulsive man. She was nearly overcome by the fear of the supernatural, but she saw through the human clay of the spellbinder and felt, through her fear, his trickery. She recalled her promise to Inyoko that at the last they would run away. She could see no way now to do even that. Then her wit returned. She saw Inyoko stealthily draw his bow and quick as thought, loose an arrow. Her voice was a wild shriek of fear that became the dread word *"Lion,"* as she dashed through the circle of warriors almost before Inyoko's arrow had reached Pandulu's heart.

There was a wild stampede while Kakesse grabbed Inyoko and they dodged about the houses out to the open, before the ruse was discovered.

Once in the grass, Kakesse whispered:

"There is a floating log just above the water rock."

And Inyoko answered:

"Come. It is our only chance."

Skillfully and silently they crept through the grass. No snake bit them, and no one found their trail. They reached the log. They paddled it out into the stream with bundles of grass. No crocodiles yet! Gradually they worked over toward the far bank. The rapids roared louder and louder in their ears. The current became swifter. Kicking and paddling furiously, they urged the log toward the bank. As the rapids were about to engulf them, Inyoko touched bottom. He seized Kakesse and drew her from the log. By a miracle they waded ashore and met no crocodile. In the darkness they crawled a little way from the river, through the band of forest which lines it, and climbed high in a tree, were one slept while the other watched.

Tomorrow they must face a hostile world of men and animals. Tonight, they were happy for they had won each other.

Dynamite Sims And the Princess

The exciting story of sundry lively events which accompanied a mutiny on the Mediterranean.

By James Francis Dwyer

POSSIBLY the logical opening of this story would be an interview that took place in Helena, Montana, in the summer of 1920 between a millionaire copper king and John Preston, known as "Always-find-'em" Preston, the best operative on the force of a noted detective agency.

The Helena millionaire had been given six months' lease of life by a Chicago doctor who had been rushed westward by a special train, and after the great doctor had pronounced his verdict, the millionaire sent for Preston. He asked Preston to— But hold on: what he asked Preston to do must wait, or this story, as a story, would be absolutely ruined. Successful stories, like successful bank robberies, depend so much on the manner in which one breaks in.

The Vieux Port is the Bowery of Marseilles, and that isn't saying anything kind about our Bowery in its very worst days. Marseilles holds the belt in the Dirtiest-Port-in-Europe competition, and the Vieux Port is the wicked left that lands the cincture. A French scientist has tried to prove that the war was prolonged by man's natural dislike to bathing—a dislike combated by the females of his family when he is at home; and the untidy, filthy soldiers of all shades of brown and black that parade the Vieux Port make one ponder over the scientist's claim.

In a shooting-gallery in this quarter on a night in the fall of 1920, two men were noticeable in the packed mass. The two stood head and shoulders over the Annamese, Senegalese, French, Chinese and Russians that filled the place. They were strangers to each other. The younger, who stood close to the barrier, was a splendidly

built man, well over six feet. His strong, muscular shoulders were made prominent by a close-fitting silk shirt; and a Pike's Peak felt hat, set at a rakish angle, proclaimed the fact that his *pays d'origine* was something over three thousand miles from grimy Marseilles.

The other was quite as tall but not so picturesque. He was dressed in close-fitting serge and wore a naval cap without a badge. He had stepped into the gallery for a moment, had caught sight of the young giant and had stayed.

The sport waned for a moment, and the proprietor of the place sought to promote business. He lifted a rifle and shook it at the youngster with the sombrero.

"Voulez vous essayer, monsieur?" he inquired.

The young giant grinned, pushed his way to the barrier and took the proffered weapon. He held it at arm's-length, and without making any noticeable efforts at sighting, fired ten times in rapid succession. The serge-clad man in the rear was interested. He thrust himself forward as the proprietor pulled a string and brought the cardboard target from the rear of the gallery. A rather sorry target! The black bull's-eye had been eaten completely away by the storm of lead that had whistled through it!

The proprietor tossed a pencil to the shooter and placed the target on the counter.

"Prière d'écrire votre nom, monsieur," he cried. *"Vous êtes un bon tireur!"*

The young giant leaned over and wrote slowly. The serge-clad man read what he wrote. The serge-clad man was amused. He was possibly the only person in the place who could read English, and so the humor of the caption was for him alone. The shooter had written:

There's only one country in the world and anyone that is there is a fool to leave it.

DYNAMITE SIMS.

AT Basso's, on the *Quai de la Fraternité,* they make *bouillabaisse* so that the gods weep because they are not mortals. It is the specialty of Marseilles, extolled by Thackeray. It is a thick soup, made of fish boiled in oil flavored with laurel leaves, onions, garlic and tomatoes, and colored with saffron. The soup is poured on slices of bread, and the fish served separately.

Dynamite Sims and Captain Ezra Haynes, the two tall men of the shooting gallery, sat before a great bowl of *bouillabaisse* and talked, while a large-eared student of the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts,* sitting at the next table, listened in amazement. The student had been wrestling with English for three years, and he realized, as he listened, how little he had learned.

"I'm riding range for Old Man Poverty," explained Mr. Dynamite Sims. "This is a sheep-man's dump, and I can't raise chuck."

"How do you view salt water?" asked Captain Ezra Haynes, the host of the occasion.

Mr. Sims speared a section of fish and answered slowly. "Friend, in the archives of our family there is only one geek who liked bucking waves in preference to bucking cayuses. He lived away back. His name was Noah."

"But this is more like a pleasure-cruise," said Captain Ezra Haynes.

"There aint no such thing as a pleasure-cruise," snapped the younger man. "They overworked those words when they were bringing us over to France."

CAPTAIN HAYNES pushed his plate aside and placed his elbows on the table. "Listen to me," he said belligerently. "I came ashore this evening thinking I could buy a machine-gun. I dropped into that gallery an' saw you tear the heart out o' that target without lookin' at it. I thought why bother about the machine-gun."

Mr. Sims smiled softly. "I could shoot once," he said modestly.

"You might recover your form if you had a sea-trip," remarked Captain Haynes. "Doctors order sea-trips for folks that are a little off. Now, this excursion of mine—" He lowered his voice so that the big-eared student was thrust into the silence. Now and then the excited interruptions of Mr. Sims shot up like sound-geysers in the quiet, hushed flow of the Captain's story. The student clutched at them vainly.

"Gee whillikins! A real live princess!" cried Sims. "Oh, man, man!"

And again. "Bolshies, eh? Hog-tied a bunch o' 'em in Arizony once, an' run 'em out o' town. I love Bolshies."

The student could see that Mr. Sims was becoming interested in the proposition —much interested. He made curious little noises and clicked his heels from time to time.

The Captain raised his voice.

"Nothing to do," he cried. "Just ambulate up and down with your ironmongery loose an' watch. We're two Americans with sixteen polecats; but polecats is polecats."

Mr. Sims spoke after a moment's reflection. "I've got three shirts an' some postcards an' things at a place on the *Cours Belsunce*," he observed.

"We'll go get them," snapped the Captain, signaling for his bill. "We can get out on the twelve o'clock tide."

DYNAMITE SIMS was on deck at five on the morning following the departure of the barque *La Ciotat* from Marseilles. He looked a queer figure as he walked up and down. *La Ciotat* was plowing down toward Corsica under a ten-knot wind, and this wind got under the brim of the felt hat and sought to toss it into the sea. It annoyed the wearer greatly.

The ship was very quiet. Mr. Sims reviewed the story told him by the Captain at Basso's on the previous evening, and he wondered if Haynes had not exaggerated the dangers of the voyage. He, Mr. Sims, would be depressed if Captain Haynes had overestimated the viciousness of his hurriedly gathered crew; and in an effort to find comfort in seeing on their faces hints of mutinies to come, Dynamite sat upon a hatch-cover and studied them as they passed.

An unprepossessing lot, certainly. They were small, weedy and dirty. Very dirty! They glanced furtively at the big American and passed whispered comments about him as their duties brought them together. Dynamite Sims nailed his observations down with simple remarks.

"Sheep-lice, every mother's son o' 'em!" he growled.

He took off his sombrero and stroked it carefully. "They look mean enough to rob a blind cattle-pup of his milk," he continued. "I guess the old man was right. If signs count for anything, this bunch is a high class propagating bed for murder in its lowest forms."

The first and second mate of *La Ciotat* were very little different from the crew. Dynamite Sims admitted they were a little taller and a little cleaner, but he doubted if their moral standards were one millimeter above those of the crew. The two mates saluted Mr. Sims, and the cowboy responded with a "Howdy," given in what he termed his "neutral but watchful" voice.

MR. SIMS had just concluded his summing up when trouble boarded *La Ciotat*. Dynamite heard a little feminine shriek of alarm, and sprang from the hatch-cover. He glared around and immediately located the person who had given voice to her fear. An extraordinarily beautiful person, to the eyes of Dynamite Sims! She stood on the port side, her back against the bulwarks, and in front of her, truculence and intimidation apparent in his manner, was a particularly frowsy and repulsive member of the crew. He was a black and bearded ruffian who had examined Dynamite with no friendly eye when the American first came on deck.

The long legs of Mr. Sims ate up the intervening space. He came up in the rear of the unwashed one, who was delivering to the startled female an address in a language of which the cowboy was ignorant. Mentally, as he hurled himself across the deck, he classed it as "Bolshie lingo," and although he did not recognize a word, his ears told him forcibly that it was no address of welcome that the seaman was delivering. The lady's face told the advancing American that she was under a verbal fusillade delivered in an effort to shoot holes in any belief that she had in her respectability, honesty, breeding and all other consoling and abstract virtues to which decent people cling.

The right hand of Mr. Sims shot out and clutched the thick jacket of the orator —clutched a splendid handful of it at a point between the shoulders. Dynamite stiffened his arm till it had the lifting capacity of a husky crane. He whirled on his heels, and the frowsy one was carried a quarter circle at terrific speed and then suddenly unloosed so that he could take full advantage of the collected momentum.

He did so. When Dynamite's fingers unloosed him, he traveled along the holystoned deck of *La Ciotat* till he met a rusty anchor-chain coiled cobra-like, with great unfriendly links, deep-bitten by sea water. The flying one thrust his face along the rust-gnawed surface, and howled as he attempted to claw himself to a standstill.

Mr. Sims took off his hat and bowed. He felt strangely awed in the presence of the lady. The first impressions he had formed of her beauty received additional furbishings now that the obstruction formed by the unwashed sailor was removed. It was rather strange and mysti-

cal beauty to Sims. He felt a little awed in her presence, a little frightened of her magnolia-like whiteness and spirituality. He fought against a sudden and absolutely ridiculous belief that came to him as he gazed at her. Her whiteness made him, for a few moments at least, feel certain that he was as filthy as the crew of *La Ciotat*.

She spoke at last. At least, Mr. Sims thought that the sweet, sweet whisper of sound came from the chiseled lips. "*Merci,*" she murmured; then again, after her big, startled eyes had taken in the un-Gallic points of the cowboy's costume, she breathed. "Thank you! Oh, thank you so, so much!"

"It was nothing," stammered Dynamite, certain now that he was addressing the princess of whom Captain Ezra Haynes had spoken over the *bouillabaisse* at Basso's. "It was only a—"

Mr. Sims' denial of effort was cut short by the frowsy offender. He had scrambled to his feet, and fully aware of the damage which the anchor-chain had done to his face, he had drawn a knife and rushed with a howl of rage at the cowboy.

Dynamite Sims turned to meet the rush, and discovered that half a dozen of the sailor's companions had slouched up to see the fun. Sims acted promptly. He drew a gun, and the effect produced by his action was weird. It reminded Dynamite of an incident in Marseilles when an officious police officer had asked him to produce his *carte d'identité*. He, Sims, had reached for his rear pocket, where he carried the paper; and the action, so impressed upon the minds of the loungers by American films as the immediate preliminary to trouble, caused every person in the immediate neighborhood to seek cover!

THE charging knife-man on the deck of *La Ciotat* tried to halt himself as the six-shooter was thrust out to meet his rush. His bare feet skidded on the boards as his head and body were flung back in an attempt to halt the galloping legs. He slipped, fell upon his back, rolled over, picked himself up; and with queer whimpers that expressed his terror, he fled in the direction of the forecastle!

Mr. Sims glanced around at the man's slouching companions. They too had fled, taking advantage of all available cover as they went.

The American thrust the gun shamefacedly out of sight. He stood, a strong muscular figure, twirling the big sombrero, his eyes upon the woman leaning against the bulwarks. At last, in an effort to brush away all traces of an unpleasant situation, he addressed himself to the vision.

"It's—it's some morning, isn't it?" he observed. "Most times I just hate the sea like poison, but when it sits still like this, I can stand it."

The wonderful woman smiled. "It is a beautiful morning, monsieur," she murmured; then after a little pause, she added: "I don't suppose I look like an American, but I am really half American. My father married a lady from Baltimore when he visited the United States years before I was born."

RUMORS of the rumpus came to the ears of Captain Ezra Haynes a few moments after the glimpse of Dynamite's revolver had caused the stampede, and the Captain rushed on deck, barefooted and half dressed. He was astounded to find Mr. Sims and the Princess sitting side by side on the hatch-cover, each evidently much interested in the conversation of the other, while upon the ship there rested a sweet and holy calm. The Captain, with a little exclamation of astonishment, turned and softly tiptoed below to complete his toilet.

Mr. Sims, at the moment the Captain came upon deck, was answering a question put by the Princess regarding his status on the ship.

"I'm not holding down any particular old job," he explained. "I'm what you might call a human gyroscope brought aboard to preserve the equilibrium. They use 'em on airplanes and things so that one end of the show wont tip up and make a mess of things. The Captain met me last evening and suggested that I come along, and I came."

"Then you're not an officer?" inquired the young lady, astonishment apparent in her voice.

"Not yet," answered Mr. Sims. "I'm a plain buck private at present, but if the Captain dies and the two little officers die, why I might get a bar or something."

"Do you—do you understand navigation?" asked the beautiful one.

"On land you can't beat me," said Mr. Sims confidently, "but at sea, miss, I know no more about navigation than a hen does about driving an automobile. On land

there's trees and rocks an' mountains to steer by, but on the sea there's only little lumps of water that disappear if you turn your head for a minute."

The Princess studied the face of Mr. Sims for a time, studied it thoughtfully. It was a rather strong and intelligent face. The eyes were honest blue eyes set well apart; the nose was well shaped; the humorous mouth balanced a chin that showed more than the ordinary amount of determination. Suddenly she spoke. It was a curious impulsive statement that startled Dynamite.

"I believe you—you could do anything on a ship if you wanted to!" she cried. "I mean you could—you could do anything that other men could do. You could steer and—and pull the sails up and down."

Dynamite Sims turned and stared at the beautiful one. He was thrilled exceedingly.

"Why do you think that?" he asked.

"I don't know," murmured the young woman. "I just thought that you—oh, let me tell you! I saw these—these awful sailors last evening, and I was afraid. Dreadfully afraid! I know the Captain is a brave man, but—but there are so many of these sailors. I talked with my father and begged him to wait, but he would not. Did—did Captain Haynes tell you why?"

"No, miss," answered Dynamite. "He told me that he was taking a Russian prince and his daughter out of France to some place in Africa, and that he didn't like his crew."

"Yes, yes; but there's more to tell you!" cried the Princess. "My father was a friend of the Allies. He fought the Soviet. There was a price on his head. He fled to Constantinople, and then we came up by a little tramp steamer to Marseilles. They —the agents of Lenine followed. Father's fear of assassination made it impossible for him to sleep. Then—then he thought of going away to some place where he would not be known and—and he hired this boat. Now you know all. My—my mother was an American and—and I have faith in you."

The young woman rose; and Dynamite Sims, hat in hand, stood up beside her.

"I'm glad I came," he said simply. "Awful glad! If this bunch starts to cut up, miss, I'll be around somewhere handy. I sure will."

"Thank you," she murmured. "I'm so glad that you are here. I'll go below now, and tell Father."

IT was late that afternoon when Captain Ezra Haynes signaled to Dynamite Sims his desire for a private parley. Mr. Sims followed the Captain to his cabin, and Haynes unbosomed himself.

"There's a liar in that fo'c'stle that's a mutiny-starter for sure," he growled. "An awful smart liar! The old Prince has a big brass-bound trunk that weighs about half a ton, and this sea-son of Ananias has spread a tale about it that's got 'em all drooling at the mouth."

"What's he said?" asked Dynamite.

"Told 'em its chock full of gold!" gasped the Captain. "Full of gold rubles! Says the old chap smuggled it out o' Russia! They're crazy about it! That one-eyed sailor just tipped me off. They're going to make a try for it. Talking open mutiny! He says they're going after the big box, an' they're going quick—tonight, I guess.

"And the mates?" questioned Dynamite.

"Son," said Captain Ezra Haynes, "the night I met up with you in Marseilles, I told you I was thinkin' of buying a machine-gun. Well, if I had one, I'd cut loose on all hands, mates and sailors. The war has knocked honesty on the head. I've just chinned one of these bat-eyed officers that's helping me run this tub, an' he wonders if it wouldn't be a good idea to get the brass-bound trunk off the Prince and turn it over to these polecats in the fo'c'stle. Says it would save trouble."

"It might," murmured Dynamite Sims, "but saving trouble in that way doesn't pay. It reminds me of a chap who gave his last lump of beef to a tiger who was following him and got so weak from want of food that the tiger caught up with him and chawed him up. I'm always for eating the beef an' then wrestlin' to see who's the best man. What about the Princess?"

"I'll tell her what's in the wind," said Captain Haynes. "It's out of the question to say anything to the old man. He's nearly off his head now. Those brutes of Bolsheviks tortured him, and he's crazy with fear. Keep your eyes open, wont you?"

"I will," said Dynamite Sims softly. "It sort of annoys me to think a bunch of polecats like them would attempt anything risky; but then, I've always heard that salt water has a funny effect on people. Anyhow, when they start, I'll be somewhere in the front trenches."

An hour later the Princess beckoned

Dynamite Sims as he stepped out of his own little cabin. Her face was white, but she showed no fear.

"I want you to see something," she said softly. "Please come this way. Step gently."

On tiptoes she led the big American to the door of the stuffy cabin occupied by her father. The door was ajar, and she signaled Dynamite Sims to look within.

Sims stepped quietly forward and peeped. An old man with a white beard was sitting before an opened trunk, the trunk that had caused the commotion in the fo'c'stle, and his long, thin fingers were busy smoothing pieces of soft lace and silk that the trunk contained. He heard nothing, and Dynamite watching him intently, felt that he was in a little world of his own, a million miles away from *La Ciotat* and the hectic atmosphere that surrounded the barque.

Dynamite tiptoed away, and at the end of the passage the girl explained.

"They are little things of my mother's," she said simply. "He loved her greatly. It was his worry over the trunk and its contents that has made those foolish sailors think it contains gold. It is more than gold to him. In it are my mother's wedding-dress and—and many little things that she wore."

Dynamite Sims left her without speaking. He went up on deck to study the atmosphere. He stood leaning against the bulwarks till the soft night crept down upon the ship—a soft, moonless night with a sky of that wonderful dark, dark blue that only the Mediterranean knows.

IT was a little after four bells when the attack began. The deck of *La Ciotat* was dark and mysterious. The god of the shadows had made encampments upon it, encampments that were disturbed at occasional moments by the frightened gleam of a lamp.

Captain Ezra Haynes and Dynamite Sims had taken up positions near the companion stairs. The Princess and her father were in their cabins. The barque rolled along under a soft breeze that came across from the Gulf of Lyons.

It was Sims that sensed the approach of the mutinous crew. His keen ears detected the padding of many bare feet upon the deck, and he gently nudged the Captain to acquaint him of the nearness of trouble.

Haynes, foolishly courageous, rose from the shadow patch and peered forward. The soft padding of the approaching sailors immediately ceased. The whine of the straining rigging, the rattling of an unsecured pan in the galley, and the soft slap of the Mediterranean's baby waves were the only sounds that disturbed the silence.

Captain Ezra Haynes flung an inquiry at the darkness. "Who's there?" he questioned.

THERE was no answer to the query. Dynamite Sims, distrustful of the silence, reached out to pull Haynes back under cover, but he was too late. Something whistled through the darkness; and the Captain, with a little grunt of pain, staggered and fell upon his knees.

Dynamite Sims, eyes slitted and fixed upon the danger spot, supported the Captain with his left hand. He guessed what had happened before Haynes whispered the information.

"Knife," growled Haynes. "Got me in the right shoulder."

"Polecats, as you say," remarked Sims. "Don't take any chances. They'll rush us in a minute."

There was a muttered order from somewhere forward; then Sims, crouching low, saw the sawlike shadows of the attackers outlined for an instant on the foresail as a flash of light came from the stern. The light was evidently a signal agreed upon. It was received with a yell, and the attackers came forward at a run.

Dynamite Sims fired—once, twice, three times; and on each occasion a throaty curse that told of pain shot out and defied the pursuing night-wind in an effort to tell the shooter that his bullet had found a mark.

The charge was halted temporarily. Mr. Sims swiftly reloaded. A bullet whistled close to the Pike's Peak hat; and Sims, fearful for the hat, took it off and placed it gently at his side. Other shots followed; there came to the ears of Dynamite and the Captain the sound of leaden woodpeckers eating their way into pine. One bullet found a glass target somewhere far in the rear of the two men near the companion. The glass pieces tinkled musically in the silence that followed the shot.

An order in Russian shot up into the night, a hysterical and high-pitched cry. It was caught up by other tongues. It was added to. It became a chant, a wild, barbaric chant, a chant of hate against organ-

ized things, a protest against law and decency. Dynamite Sims set his teeth. The words seemed a jeer at civilization, a filthy, horrid jeer at everything that decent people respected.

They charged then!

DYNAMITE SIMS fired with the same coolness that had marked his exhibition on the Vieux Port. It was the coolness that comes to the man who has met Old Dame Trouble on many occasions and has successfully tweaked her nose at every meeting. Haynes, although wounded, ably supported the American.

It was a wild and queer affair. Twice the mutineers lost courage and were driven back, leaving a few dark and groaning figures to mark the high tide of their advance. The barque lurched forward, indifferent to the battle on her deck. The little wind sang songs in the rigging.

After the second retreat of the mutineers there was a long interval of quiet. Dynamite Sims and Haynes whispered together.

"What's happening?" questioned Sims.

"Don't know," gasped the Captain. "They're sick of it, possibly. The second mate, Koltz, is with them. I heard his voice."

"They'll come again," said the cheerful Dynamite. "We've stopped a few of 'em, though. I guess there's half a dozen that want the ambulance wagon. The durned fools! Did you see what's inside that trunk?"

"No," growled the Captain. "I wish I'd never seen the trunk itself. I'm a fool! If there's one little ounce of real damnation coasting about a town, I'm the chap that will find it."

"And you're nice an' liberal when you do find it," observed Mr. Sims. "I would be in my little bed on the Cours Belsunce in Marseilles if you hadn't come along and good-naturedly split the ounce with me. I'm not a—"

A SOFT whisper came from the companionway, and Dynamite Sims' amazement throttled his humorous jeer at the Captain. It was the voice of the Princess that came to his ears.

"What has happened?" she questioned. "I—I cannot hold my father below. He—he wants to come up on deck to—to fight and—"

The voice of the old man came from the stairs as Dynamite Sims crept to the side of the girl, a protesting shrill voice which speared the silence that encompassed the ship and was carried forward by the breeze.

"I will not stay below and let others fight for me!" screamed the old man. "I have no treasure with me! These Bolsheviks are scoundrels, filthy, lying scoundrels and I am not afraid of them!"

Dynamite Sims heard an angry roar from the fo'c'stle; he caught the Princess in his arms and thrust her back down the stairs; then, as her father staggered by him, Sims turned to meet the charge.

THE mutinous crew surged toward the three men at the head of the companionway—surged toward them in a blind wave of hate and greed. They yelled and cursed, firing blindly, and possibly knifing each other by mistake in the darkness.

Sims was the coolest fighter. He took no chances; he allowed nothing to disturb his nerve. Quietly, methodically and with deadly accuracy, he fired. He was conscious of the fall of the girl's father. He heard the soft thud of the old man as he fell, heard the little cry of horror that came from the girl. He heard also the throttled cry of the Captain, who was swept down and knifed by a quartet of mutineers. But these sounds, disheartening as they were, did not upset Mr. Sims. He was in a big fight, and when he was in a big fight, he allowed nothing to upset his nerve. His aim was everything.

He retreated down the companionway, thrusting the girl before him. She wished to stay with the body of her father, but the big American was adamant.

"Plenty o' time for that later," he growled. "Now we've got to beat 'em. Just got to beat 'em! Load this gun for me. Cartridges in my pocket."

The "sheep-lice" came after them. A rather dangerous expedition! Dynamite Sims, crouched in the passage, watched a strip of mottled shadow on the stairs, a strip that became, as the moments passed, the doorstep of eternity for three of the most adventurous of the mutineers.

There came a lull, and Dynamite Sims and the Princess talked in whispers. They were crouched close to each other in the dark passage. Sims felt the perfumed warmth of her body, the sweet fragrance of her breath as she leaned forward to whisper to him. Selfishly he blessed the mutiny, blessed the brass-bound trunk that

had stirred the cupidity of the cutthroats of the forecastle.

"Guess they've lost their punch now," observed Dynamite after a long period of silence, during which no sounds of commotion came from the deck. "Mobs are always like that. They get themselves all het up, but the moment they meet some one with a toy pistol, they try to see who can sneak home quickest in case the authorities ask for names."

"Do you—do you think it's over?" asked the girl.

"I think so," said Mr. Sims. "I'll bet that quite a bunch o' those birds are back in their little bunks trying to pretend that they've had a good night's slumber. Guess I'll go up and have a look round."

"Oh, please," cried the girl. "Please look at my father. But—but there is danger."

"There's no danger," said Dynamite. "They've got under cover, an' they'll leave it to the law to find the guilty. That's why mob-stuff is popular."

"But—but you might get shot," gasped the Princess.

"Not me," observed the cowboy, getting to his feet. An old Creole mammy gave me a charm against bullets. Wore it all through the war an' never got touched."

"What is it?" breathed the girl.

"A yellow pebble with a spot o' white in the center," answered Dynamite. "I'll show it to you when the sun comes up. Now, you stay right here, an' I'll go up an' chase those coyotes into their holes."

IT was a liner of the *Messagéries Maritimes* that halted in obedience to the signals of distress flying from *La Ciotat*. The liner sent a boat aboard, and the officer commanding found Mr. Dynamite Sims and a very beautiful young lady on deck standing guard over ten men of the crew that Sims had disarmed and trussed up in true cowboy fashion. The Russian prince and Captain Ezra Haynes, both badly wounded, were in their berths.

"Better go aboard and talk to the skipper," said the officer of the liner. "We'll look after these chaps."

Dynamite Sims and the Princess were taken aboard the big boat, where they told the story of the mutiny to the captain—a very sympathetic captain. He promised to do everything he could. He would give Mr. Sims, the Princess, the Prince and Captain Haynes passage back to Marseilles and would place enough men aboard *La Ciotat* to take her into Toulon.

"It was lucky for everyone that Captain Haynes took you aboard, Mr. Sims," observed the commander of the liner as they returned to the deck. "Very lucky."

A sharp-faced man lounging against the rail and watching *La Ciotat* came to life at the mention of the name "Sims." He stared at the big cowboy, hurriedly glanced at a photograph in his pocketbook, then stepped forward.

"Pardon me," he said, bowing politely. "I heard the name. Sims, isn't it? Now, I wonder is it possible that you're Lincoln Garfield Sims of Helena, Montana?"

"The same," answered Mr. Sims. "The same person, better known as Dynamite."

THE stranger smiled. "I'm John Preston, better known as Always-find-em Preston of the Blankton force," he said. "Two months ago your father, Henry Sims, the millionaire copper king of Montana, gave me a commission to find you and bring you home. He had a row with you years ago—"

"Just because I had a plug of dynamite in my trousers pocket," interrupted Sims.

"That's it," said the Pinkerton man, "but it's all forgotten now. He wants you home, boy. Some fool specialist says he has only six months to live, but I bet if he sees you, he'll live to be a hundred. We'll make Marseilles tomorrow, and there's a boat going to the old U. S. the next day. Are you coming?"

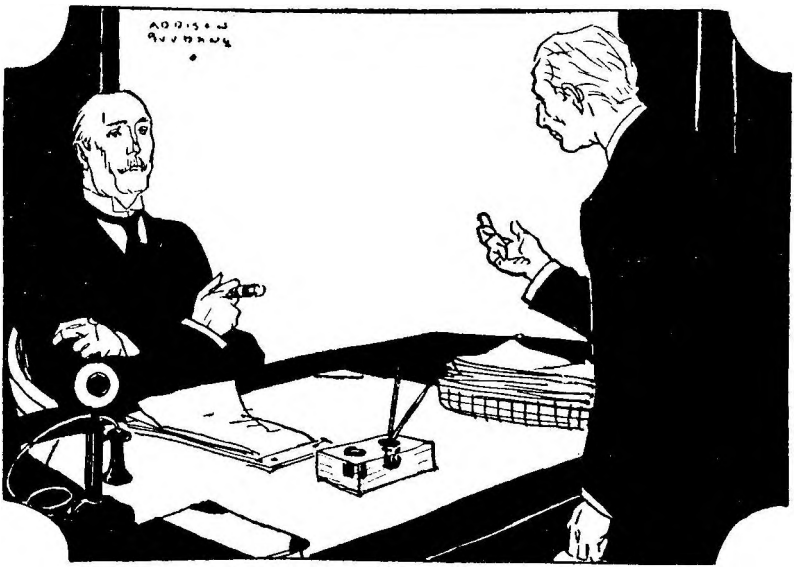
Dynamite Sims took off his Pike's Peak hat and glanced softly at the Princess. "Hold your horses," he murmured, addressing the detective, "I'll tell you in a minute."

The captain of the liner, the detective and a few inquisitive passengers fell back, leaving Dynamite Sims and the Princess alone.

"It's really your country," the officer heard Dynamite say. "Your mother came from Baltimore, an' it's only a little step from Baltimore to Montana. If you would say—"

The detective didn't hear the rest. He stood off with the captain and watched *La Ciotat* bobbing up and down in the soft morning sunshine.

Dynamite Sims broke the silence. "You can wire for those reservations," he cried. "Me an' this young lady are going home."



I. S. O. W.

A story of the four mysterious initials that were more than worth their price.

By THOMAS ADDISON

THE tall, meager old man with his hand on the outside knob of the Brunner Manufacturing Company's office door paused. It was the momentary deep-breathing pause the swimmer makes before his plunge; then the old man turned the knob, and holding erect his head, walked inside.

To get to see Marcus Brunner, the controlling mind of the great business that bore his name, was not a facile task. One had to have an appointment, or a very remarkable excuse. Merely to request an interview without advancing compelling cause was as if one should ask the Twentieth Century Limited to stop for a hat lost out the window. Yet this, in essence, was what the white-haired old man had spurred himself to do. He had no claim on Marcus Brunner's time; he was as unknown to him as any stray dog of the streets.

Back of a railing that halved the anteroom a youth was entrenched at a table, drearily folding into mailing envelopes a stack of form letters towering before him. There were few idle moments permitted even to the humblest in the Brunner Company's employ.

"Whojawannasee?" inquired this young person, making one word of it, possibly for economy's sake.

"The president," replied the man. A faint trace of alien accent marked his voice.

"'Pointment?"

"No."

The youth rested from his labors while he took a mental inventory of the caller. It passed casually over the face, of a singular translucent pallor, the level challenging eyes, wide straight mouth, deep square chin—the boy passed over with a glance the true index of the man, and sought to seek his quality in his clothes. It was a short chapter and sufficient to the world-wisdom of sixteen years.

"This old guy," he reflected, "is on his uppers, or so near it that if you joggle him his toes will show. Wants to make a touch, of course. Merry beans, they aint all dead yet."

However, without waste of words there was a simple means of getting rid of "they" who yet obstinately persisted in drawing the breath of life. A scratch pad with a pencil dangling from it was languidly proffered across the rail.

"Gimme name an' business. I'll take it in."

And bring it out again, as the man well knew. He said:

"Instead, I will ask you to take my personal card to Mr. Brunner."

He brought forth a pocket case of alligator skin, dark and burnished with age, opened it, selected a card, and was closing it when a little packet slipped out and fell to the floor. Apparently it was not noticed by the stranger, but the youth, leaning over from his table, peered at it. Bank notes!

"I say, sir!" His tone was greatly changed. "You've dropped something."

"Yes? Oh! Thank you." The other stooped unhurriedly and recovered the packet. "Your name is—"

"William, sir."

"Well, William, this is my card. You will take it, if you please, to Mr. Brunner direct. If he is engaged I will wait."

The card, engraved in script, read:

Amos Sloane, I. S. O. W.

William looked up from it with troubled eyes.

"But your business with him, sir. It's a pos-see-teeve rule—"

Amos Sloane stopped him. "My business is stated on the card, following my name. Mr. Brunner will understand."

The boy, puzzled, uncertain, yet curiously compelled, got up from his table.

"I may get canned for this," he mumbled, and disappeared through a ground glass door at his left.

MARCUS BRUNNER was poring over a long column of typed items on a sheet of crown folio when William nervously insinuated himself into his presence. Brunner was a gray, compact, able-looking party with a gimlet eye and a clipper tongue. In office hours he clipped his speech to bare syntactical essentials.

"Well?" he growled.

William slid noiselessly over to the desk, and laid Sloane's card on it. He spoke with bated breath.

"Gen'l'man to see you, sir."

Brunner darted a side glance at the bit of pasteboard.

"Don't know him. Business?"

"He said, sir, it was there, on the card. Said you would understand."

Here was an implication that Brunner from his high estate could not very well descend to argue with his office boy. He drew the card to him, and dwelt for an instant on the cryptic initials set after the name.

"H-m-m. Ah—yes. Fetch him," he grunted.

WHEN William had deftly subtracted himself from the scene Brunner caught up his inter-office telephone. His nephew in a distant department answered. The nephew was a recent university graduate.

"Jim," snapped Brunner, "got a man's card here. I. S. O. W. after name. What's it mean? Eh? New to you? . . . . Whassat? 'International Society of Warblers.' Bah! You're an ass."

Brunner returned to his statement, or whatever it was, but for a moment only. William knocked, and Amos Sloane was ushered in.

The manufacturer had, in a transient way, expected a brisk, positive sort of person—one of these business scientists, it might be, with a new efficiency system. Certainly he had not expected a pallid old man, who, if general appearance could be relied on, was headed for the scrap heap. Yet—was he? H-m-m. His copperplate card was not a resurrected memento of a past day. No tell-tale touch of time ivoried its margin. It was virgin fresh. And there was nothing of the suppliant in the man's carriage. It was firm, contained, resolute.

Brunner motioned to a chair.

"Can give you five minutes. Confess I don't get your business. I. S. O. W. Explain, please."

"In Search of Work," said Sloane with slow distinctness.

Brunner regarded him intently for the space of several seconds. A spark, peculiar and exceptional, gleamed in his boring eyes, and died.

"How old?" he asked.

"Sixty."

"Been sick? Look it."

"No. I am on a diet for the present. To reduce my blood."

"H-m-m. Got any money?"

"Twenty-three dollars."

"All told?"

Sloane made an affirmative motion with his head. He was matching brevity in kind. Brunner took up the card from the desk. He tapped it allusively with his finger.

"Expensive in ratio to capital."

"It got me in here," returned Sloane tersely.

Again the fitful gleam in Brunner's eyes. He was studying the man minutely, forgetful of his own predetermined time limit.

"Tried it elsewhere?" he queried.

"You are the first," Sloane told him. "I've been seeing understrappers for four months—'guardians of the gate.' With them it is not what a man is, it's what he seems. And so I never won to fountain head. I woke up to the fool's part I'd been playing. A trick was needful, it appeared, to get a hearing, a trick that yet was a truth. Very well, I would devise one. I did, and it worked."

Brunner admitted it with a gesture.

"And now. What next?"

"I want work. Something at which a man in full possession of himself can make more than the requirements of mere existence; something that calls for ability, judgment, brains."

"'Something.' Well, what?"

"I leave that to you."

Brunner bent forward. He stabbed a derogatory finger at the other. His voice was brutal when he spoke.

"You leave it to me. Well, I'll ask you this: what have you done with your sixty years that you come now begging for a job? Brains! Great heaven, man, have you ever had any?"

THE applicant's thin face flushed, but he met the attack without flinching, with, one might have fancied, something like tolerance in his manner.

"A proper question, sir. I'll answer it. Eleven months ago I was worth a quarter of a million, in dollars. Made it in Central America—coffee, dyes, tortoise shell."

"Ah," murmured Brunner. The little wisp of accent was accounted for.

"Twenty years I had of it in those countries," continued Sloane. "I started with ten thousand dollars, saved in traveling for a grocery house, now dissolved; a western house. Down there, in Carrabozo, I had to buck a syndicate that stirred hell to break me, and didn't. Then, last year, the Zelayo revolution cleaned me out. Not only that, it burned me out, the roof over my head. And my wife was sick. A delicate operation was necessary, beyond the skill of those native *cirujanos*."

Sloane stopped. Then he said:

"This is all too long. I'll just say that I had five hundred dollars when I landed here. It was in November. This is April. In between I've tried to get a man-sized post. I'm not asking for just a 'job.' I had brains, have them, and want to use them. I've still ten good years in me. And I'll mention this: I may be down but, by God, I'm not out—yet."

He rose, spiritually valiant, as he said it, but of a sudden put out a clutching hand to the chair, for his unspiritual knees trembled and played traitor to him.

"Sit down, sir," barked Brunner. "I haven't asked you to go."

Sloane perforce let himself drop on the chair. He essayed a pale smile.

"I'll remind you that five minutes was my allowance," he stated.

"You've taken more," retorted Brunner. "But we wont argue that. It's getting to my—h-m-m—lunch hour. I have it sent in," he lied. "Glad to have you join me. I've thought of something. We'll talk it over afterwards."

He wheeled around to his desk, grabbed the city telephone, got the chophouse across the way, and said:

"Marcus Brunner talking. Send to my office cold roast beef, rare. Potato salad. French rolls. Pot of coffee. Apple pie. For two, understand. *Two*. Put cream on that pie. Give you ten minutes."

He turned to Sloane.

"Your wife. Is she getting on?"

"Fairly well, thank you."

"Children?"

Sloane shook his head. "Not living."

Some one tapped at the door, and looked in—a stenographer with a handful of letters. Brunner waved her away.

"Later. Keep out till I ring. Everybody." He went on to Sloane. "Speak Spanish, I suppose?"

"And Portuguese. I spent two years in and around Rio and Sao Paulo."

"H-m-m. Know what we make—the Brunner Company?"

That wraith of a smile flicked the older man's lips again.

"Building and factory supplies," he answered. "One of the two largest in the line in the East."

"*The* largest," corrected Marcus Brunner severely. "So, you looked us up before coming."

"Naturally," replied Sloane with a slight lift of his brows. Brunner noted it.

"H-m-m," he remarked. His eyes traveled to the crown folio. He reached tentatively for it, but midway his hand changed its direction and returned with the morning's paper. He tendered it to Sloane.

"Like to glance at the news? We'll talk presently."

So saying he abruptly gave himself over to a renewed study of the folio.

IT was on this peaceful picture that the marveling William with the man from the chophouse entered. At Brunner's direction a table was brought in from the outer office and the luncheon spread on it.

"Come back in half an hour," he bade the waiter. "Now then," he said to Sloane, "let's eat."

He helped his guest with a certain nicety of proportion as between the two of them, seeing that his own plate was no less furnished than the other's. Sloane ate with a curious deliberation. As a matter of fact, it expressed a merciless restraint. Brunner, guardedly watching him, talked a string of commonplaces, making a great show the while of plying his knife and fork. Finally, with an annoyed ejaculation he pushed away from the table.

"Look here, Sloane," he broke forth, "you'll have to excuse me a minute. Message to send. Clean forgot it. I wont have the girl in; I'll go out there. I've finished anyway. Take your time." He got up and produced a box of cigars from a drawer. "Help yourself when you're through."

The waiter had returned and was departing with the dishes when Brunner came back. He had waited until just that moment. Sloane was seated by a window drawing on a cigar. His look was of a man reinvigorated, reinstated with himself.

"Now," began Brunner briskly, "we'll talk business."

"First," interjected Sloane, "let me thank you, sir."

It was simply said yet freighted with understanding. Brunner felt his ears turning red.

"For what?" he blustered. "I've given you a bit of my time because—h-m-m—it's possible I can use you. Brazil. The Argentine. Been thinking of reaching out for some of that trade. But I'll try you on another track first. Difficult, I warn you. Takes brains."

HE grinned dryly, and stopped long enough to light a cigar. Sloane sat quite still, waiting. Every faculty of his mind was tuned to receptiveness, for here, after months, his chance was come. Brunner proceeded:

"Barnaby Horton, Incorporated, is a building contractor. Biggest on this seaboard. Business worth having. Only two real competitors for it, the Brunner Company, and Jewett & Colver. Other concerns can't handle it. Too big. But" —Brunner's face darkened—"for three years J. & C. have underbid us, scalped our price by a fraction. Last year we cut our profit just short of the bone. No good. J. & C. went a cut deeper. Of course, they can figure our costs pretty close—but to beat us to the contract three years hand running! Something damned queer about it. Can you stick a pin in it anywhere?"

Brunner whipped out the query irritably. He was jealous of the great business machine he presided over. Anything that tended to question its prestige aroused in him an ireful resentment that only triumphant vindication could appease.

"I should say some one has a pull with Horton," observed Sloane.

"Precisely not," rasped the manufacturer. "Horton plays no favorites. He's square as a block of ice, and as cold." He snatched the sheet of typed folio from his desk. "Horton is in the market again. A big line of supplies. Here's our bid. Low as the barest safety and self-respect will admit. Now, Sloane"—Brunner stabbed at him again with his finger—"to land this contract has become more than a matter of business with me; it has become a point of personal pride. You have ingenuity, initiative. What's the answer?"

Sloane looked away out of the window at the uninspiring row of similar windows in the building opposite. He did not reply

at once, and Brunner let him be, though his eyes sifted him, as it were, inch by inch. At length Sloane spoke.

"I've been out of the country a good while. I haven't any quick references to submit—"

Brunner shut him off. "I'm not without judgment of my own," he snapped. "H-m-m. This bid must be in by Friday. The close is four o'clock. Sharp work. Gives you only three days."

"I'll take it on," said Sloane quietly. He made to rise but Brunner quickly checked him.

"Wait!" He pushed a button, and scribbled a line on a card. To the young man who appeared he handed the slip. "At once," he enjoined. To Sloane he remarked: "I'm not asking your plans. It's the result that counts."

Sloane nodded absently.

"When," he inquired, "have you been in the habit of putting in your bid?"

"Mailed the night before. Wax-sealed with the company's cipher."

Sloane said nothing further. He resumed his study of the opposing windows. The young man returned, delivered a roll of bills, and took himself off. Brunner passed the roll on to Sloane.

"A hundred. For expense." He added as if it were an afterthought: "Maybe some personal purchases you'll think of. No accounting required."

He busied himself at his desk. Sloane stood up. He looked down at the sturdy back presented to him, swallowed queerly, and walked as far as the door before speaking. Then, as formerly, he said simply: "I thank you, sir," and went out.

AS Amos Sloane studied the situation it offered but two possible hypotheses: either Jewett & Culver with an almost incredible nicety of calculation had succeeded for three years running in just barely shading the Brunner Company's price; or, they had a pull with some one in Horton's office who had access in advance to the bids. Sloane's experience of concession mongering in Central America inclined him to this latter supposition; and, he recalled, the method was not entirely exotic to these upper latitudes.

He formulated his plan of procedure with meticulous precision. With the exception of an hour devoted to a clothier he gave the remainder of the day to it. Success meant life to him, failure—but that he would not permit himself to contemplate.

Wednesday morning he dropped in at Brunner's office. The president surveyed him in silent approval. Sloane looked the part of a going business man.

"I want," said Sloane, "an itemized estimate by the Brunner Company on a quantity of supplies for the American Building Syndicate of San José. To total about forty thousand dollars at close figures. Also, on plain paper, a copy of the items omitting price extensions. Could you have it delivered to me at the Alton Hotel today?"

Brunner's eyes widened a trifle.

"You are staying there?"

"I will be, overnight at least. Possibly longer."

He offered no explanation, and Brunner did not ask it. He would give Sloane a free rein until Friday.

"You shall have the estimate," he promised. "Anything else?"

"Yes. I will suggest that you hold up that bid. Have two more prepared, one at a substantial increase over the other, and both bettering the present bid. I will see you tomorrow before mailing time. Hold up everything until then, please."

When he had gone Brunner settled down in his chair, and rubbed his chin.

"H-m-m. Coming back strong," he murmured. "No chloroform bottle for him." He chuckled at the thought, and rang for his sales manager.

SLOANE, after he had left Brunner, sought a booth and telephoned the Horton office. In a feigned voice he asked for Mr. Barnaby Horton. That gentleman, he was told, was out of town; he would not be back till noon of Thursday. Could the speaker, Mr. Horton's secretary, be of service? Sloane replied in the negative, and hung up. The information received simplified his course wonderfully. He was prepared for an interview with Horton, but it was the secretary whom, ultimately, he intended to reach.

He returned to his lodgings and put into a handbag the few necessaries he would need overnight. Along in the afternoon he went to The Alton and registered. He sat down in his room and wrote, over his proper name, a letter on the house stationery to Barnaby Horton, Inc. He was

recently arrived from Costa Rica, he stated, and purposed giving himself the honor of calling on Mr. Horton the following day—at one o'clock, he put it, after reflection—to entreat his expert advice in the matter of a rather large contemplated purchase of building supplies for a syndicate at San José, C. R. He was informed that Mr. Horton positively was the first authority in this line in the country. For effect, he ended with a touch of Latinism—he begged to be considered Mr. Horton's very attentive, humble servant, etc.

The letter mailed, Sloane went home for dinner with his wife, a small anticipatory step toward the regal celebration he had in mind when the present business should be concluded. His tread was elastic; indeed, were it not for his white hairs, it might have been called cocky. And he smiled at his thoughts as he went along—"What is it some sentimental idiot has called us? 'The builders of yesterday?' Ha! I'll show him. I'm of today, still building."

Sloane returned to his hotel for the night. He had a strong prevision of an early morning call for him on the telephone. If it came, he would feel confirmed in his suspicions. It did come, at a few minutes after nine. The same person he had spoken with the day before was on the wire.

"Mr. Amos Sloane of Costa Rica?"

"Yes," responded Sloane in his natural voice. "Who is it, please?"

"I am Lester Wade, Mr. Barnaby Horton's secretary. I have just had your note, Mr. Sloane. I'm sorry, but Mr. Horton is away. Wont be back till Friday. Perhaps I can give you the information you wish. Could you call, say at ten instead of one? I shall be out more or less the rest of the day."

Sloane assured him that the hour would suit his convenience, and smiled elatedly as he replaced the receiver. Wade was lying about Horton's return. His purpose was evident. He wished to anticipate his principal with some "expert advice" of his own, and Sloane fancied he could perceive in advance what the drift of it would be.

AT ten promptly he put in his appearance at the Horton office. Mr. Lester Wade, a keen-faced young man, received him with empressement. He regretted Mr. Horton's absence; he was to have been back today, but had wired to the contrary. As he said this, Mr. Wade companionably shoved a night telegram across the desk to his visitor.

"Dreadful chatterbox, isn't he?" he submitted humorously.

Sloane looked at the dispatch. It was dated Scranton, and contained two words —"Friday noon." So Wade had not lied yesterday. It took a prop from under Sloane's elaborations. But he had other props left. He smiled at the secretary.

"Mr. Horton is economical of his time, it seems. I am rather glad I did not intrude on him."

"He probably would have turned you over to me anyway, after a word or so," Wade said chattily. "He turns everything he can over to me, except bids and contracts. He keeps those strictly under his hat. Sacred! For no profane eye but Barnaby Horton's." He grinned at his own wit.

Sloane felt that another of his props was gone. And yet Brunner was positive that Horton played no favorites. If this were truth, then Jewett & Colver had simply been throwing profits overboard to whip a rival. Sloane was smitten with a sudden great fear of defeat. But he would not knuckle under; he had at least one prop left.

"I imagine," he spoke up, "that to Mr. Horton my errand would appear trivial. I trust that you will not find it so when I say that I am in a real quandary." He continued: "I have a bid on supplies from the Brunner Manufacturing Company, but I'm in doubt about their figures. I feel that they might be bettered. There are other concerns, I know, but my time is limited. It precludes shopping around among them. My thought in seeking Mr. Horton was that he might direct me to a house where he knew I would be accorded liberal treatment." Sloane gave a self-deprecatory shrug. "You see, I have been so long in those lower countries that I am, veritably, a stranger in my own."

"I understand," Wade sympathized. "I don't quite get the Brunner people these days," he frowned. "Old house. No better in the line. But they need new blood in their sales department, or something." He referred to Sloane's letter which he had kept lying before him. "You are buying largely, you say. That should make a difference."

Sloane felt in his pocket and drew out a couple of long envelopes. One, as Wade could see, bore the Brunner Company's imprint; the other was plain. Sloane passed the letter to him.

"You can judge for yourself," he said. "You will find the items set down there. That's an interesting orological map on the wall. If I may—?"

"Sure. Help yourself, sir. Some of the boss' pickups," said Wade as he fished in the envelope.

Sloane walked over to the map, and studied it leisurely. Presently Wade addressed him. He had restored the list to its cover.

"Pretty tidy order for some one," he remarked. "You might see Jewett & Colver. They rank with Brunner, and I have a friend there, Colver's stenographer. By the way, they've been getting most of our business lately. If you wish, I'll speak to them."

He returned the envelope as Sloane resumed his seat. Sloane replaced it in his pocket.

"I shall be profoundly obliged," he bowed. "And as my time is measured—"

"Right away," the secretary assured him, and turned to his telephone. "Give me Miss Kimball's desk," he requested when Jewett & Colver answered. "Edith, this is Lester. There's a gentleman here from Central America—San Josey—a Mr. Amos Sloane. He's in the market for supplies. Will be down shortly. Tell Mr. Colver to treat him right. He"—Wade winked cunningly at his vis-à-vis—"he's a friend of Mr. Horton's. . . . . What? Sure. Be ready at eight. Curtain at eight-thirty sharp. Goo'by."

SLOANE bestowed a paternal smile on him.

"If it will help your friend at all I hope my errand there will be successful," he observed.

"It wont hurt her," Wade grinned. He added expansively: "If you should be around here this summer you might hear wedding bells ringing. This is J. & C.'s card. A taxi will land you at the door in ten minutes. Call on me if there's anything else I can do. Glad to serve you."

Sloane departed for Jewett & Colver's with his mouth grimly set. A little of the fear that had fallen on him was lifted. He had yet a fighting chance.

At three in the afternoon of this same day Jewett & Colver's estimate was delivered to Sloane at The Alton, as agreed. One glance at it and he made for the telephone.

"I'm coming down," he said to Brunner. "Please make ready that highest bid for the mail."

SHORTLY afterwards he walked into the Brunner Company's outer office. William paused in his Sisyphusian task to fawn on him. Sloane spoke a cordial word and passed on.

"Well?" Brunner greeted him.

"It looks promising, but it's not settled. Tomorrow will tell. What do you think of this?"

Sloane spread out on the desk J. & C.'s estimate, and by the side of it the Brunner Company's. Brunner studied the two in absorbed silence. Then he looked up at Sloane.

"Cute," he chuckled. "High on some items. Low on others. But the total—man, they've saved you nine hundred dollars!"

"I wonder what they'd do if I called them up and told them their bid was high?" said Sloane with mock gravity. "They couldn't very well say I was a liar."

Brunner grinned. "Are you ready to tell me how you worked it?" he quizzed.

Sloane related the facts in a way that pleased the president—succinctly, directly, and without self-applause.

"Wade naturally thought," he finished, "that I'd made a mistake when he found your estimate in the plain envelope. I gave him plenty of time, and I'm sure he jotted down the total. I saw to it that my back was kept well to him. Of course, as soon as I was gone he 'phoned the girl. She was all ready for me when I came, a shrewd, sharp little business woman. And Colver—he's a fox. But it was plain that he's damnably jealous of the Brunner Company. He'd joyfully send flowers to decorate its last long sleep. As for Wade, he undoubtedly gets his rake-off from Colver. I rather think it goes into a hymeneal nest-egg he's laying by."

"Keep on," urged Brunner when the other stopped.

"That's as far as I've got at present."

"H-m-m. Do you realize, Sloane, that so far as the Horton matter goes you haven't proved a thing? Not an atom of evidence that would stand law?"

"Yes," assented Sloane. "I'd be laughed out of court, I suppose."

"Then where do we get off? Wade says he doesn't see the bids."

"Wade lies," declared Sloane calmly.

"Sealed and ciphered? Come now."

Sloane smiled patiently.

"Your envelope imprint could be duplicated at any type shop in the city. Your cipher any die-cutter could reproduce. And the expense would be but a few dollars. What is that to a man who is making hundreds by it?"

Brunner whistled under his breath.

"Penitentiary offense."

"Yes. But Wade feels perfectly secure. Tomorrow, for example. Horton wont be in till noon. I saw the wire. Your bid will be delivered in the early mail. Wade will have hours before him. And so will J. & C."

"Well?"

"Bids," you say, proceeded Sloane, "are receivable up to four o'clock. Until then you are at liberty to withdraw yours, and submit a revised one—by messenger. In the meantime J. & C. will have submitted theirs. It will underprice your first bid, but not the second probably. You should get the contract."

"And still you haven't proved anything to Horton," protested Brunner. "I don't want to just scotch this snake, Sloane; I want to smash it. Don't think," he added, as the other was silent, "that I'm underrating what you've done. Good work. Fine. But if you could find a way to open Horton's eyes. That would settle the business."

SLOANE, his brows knitted, held his peace a while longer. Then he said:

"There's a chance. But I'll need written authority to represent you. Do you wish to go that far with me?"

"Got to. Can't go back now," rejoined the manufacturer with a humorous shrug. "I'll have to ask, though, what I'm to be committed to."

"I am going to try to catch Wade in the act," Sloane told him. "If I succeed I must be in a position to command him."

"Right," commented Brunner. He called in his stenographer.

Sloane went away with a limited power of attorney from Marcus Brunner, not as president—he could not delegate that power—but as a stockholder in the company.

FRIDAY morning at a little before eight Sloane stood back in a doorway across the street from the building in which Barnaby Horton had his office. The postman came along on his first round, and entered. Almost on his heels came Lester Wade, approaching from the corner.

Sloane let loose a startled breath of surprise. Wade was not alone. Miss Edith Kimball was with him. Their steps were hurried. They popped into the building like the cork from a bottle. Sloane's surprise had passed at once. The girl had come to copy Brunner's bid and convey it to Colver. Of course! He waited for a while. Then he crossed to the building and hunted up the janitor.

"There are thieves in the Barnaby Horton office," he announced in a quick crisp voice. "Get your pass-key and come."

It shocked the janitorial dignitary out of his crested calm.

"The hell you say. How do you know? Who are you?" he volleyed.

Sloane turned away with an angry gesture.

"The fool! He'd argue with a drowning man. I'll get an officer."

"Here! Wait! I'm coming, Mister," cried the other. "If there's any crooked work in this building I want to know about it."

At Horton's corridor door they stopped and listened. The rustling of paper and low-pitched voices penetrated to them. Sloane whispered to the man with him.

"Quick now. Don't bungle it."

With a deftness that possibly predicated secret experiences of his own, the janitor inserted his key and threw wide the door. It was a tableau for a camera—the man and woman stricken dumb and motionless at Wade's desk; the two silent, menacing figures in the door.

It lasted but an instant. The girl cried out woefully, and shriveled down in her seat. Wade's hand pounced with eagle swiftness on an envelope with broken seals and gathered it in. In the same breath he was on his feet, his lips drawn back in a snarl at Sloane.

"What the devil does this mean?" he bristled.

"You are caught, Wade," said Sloane composedly. He pointed to a table in the corner. On it was a candle, and by it lay a stick of sealing wax. "We've got it all figured out," he continued. "You've come

to the end of your string. Do you wish me to go on before this man?"

A choked sob broke from the girl. Wade's face blanched sickeningly. He motioned laxly to the door. Sloane first stepped to the desk and swept up the papers on it. He stretched out a compelling hand toward Wade:

"That Brunner envelope. Give it to me."

Wade hesitated, but this terrible old man's eye, like blue ice in its cold intensity, was stabbing into him, and he complied. Then Sloane addressed the waiting janitor:

"You may leave us now. But stay within call." He touched his pocket significantly. "I'll have something to say to you later."

When the door had closed on the gaping caretaker the secretary quavered a question:

"What are you doing, mixing in this? I—I thought you were a gentleman."

"A mutual mistake," replied Sloane gravely. "I am Mr. Marcus Brunner's hired man. Perhaps you'd like to see my authority from him."

HE tendered the paper. Wade glanced at it, and wilted into a chair.

"So, it was a plant all along, yesterday and today," he muttered brokenly.

Sloane nodded.

"Personally distasteful but imperative. We wont go into particulars unless you insist. There is but one way to save yourself, to save this young woman—a written confession in duplicate, one of them for Colver. I'll have in the janitor to witness it. Afterwards, if you care to wait with me for Mr. Horton, you may. Otherwise, you can pack up and clear out. I wont hinder you."

The girl was sobbing unrestrainedly now, her face buried in her arms on the desk. Wade stared at her a long minute. It was she who had, in the first instance, proposed this thing to him. He spoke to Sloane.

"If you will leave her out of it, all right. I'll do it."

Sloane's hard eyes changed.

"That is agreeable to me," he said mildly.

AT half after one o'clock Sloane was seated with Brunner in his office. Brunner was in possession of Wade's confession. Sloane had dispatched the duplicate from Horton's office to Jewett & Colver by special messenger. Furthermore, Brunner held the big contractor's acceptance of his high bid; accepted without the formality of waiting to the final hour.

"So," trumpeted the president, "he said it was a matter of simple justice, did he? I told you Horton was square, played no favorites."

"Yes," concurred Sloane. "It will be some time, I imagine, before he'll consider a bid from J. & C."

He fell quiet, looking reflectively out of the window. Brunner regarded him with a prideful proprietary interest.

"Shake, Sloane," he erupted suddenly, and stuck out his hand. The ceremony duly performed he went on, garrulously for him:

"Over the bid I first intended to put in you have saved me seventeen hundred dollars. Half of that is yours. Be quiet!" he barked. "I've got the floor. You are going on the pay roll of this house—today—as manager of the Foreign Department I'm creating. We'll fix the salary later—Dammit, don't you spring that 'I thank you;' I am doing the thanking. H-m-m. What I'm getting at to say, Sloane, is this: you were dead right the day you sent that I. S. O. W. card in here. You said, 'I may be down, but I'm not out.' Well, sir, *you certainly are not!*

"Now, let's go over to John's chophouse and have a feed. I've been holding off till you came, and I could eat a horse."

Tryst of the Tidelands

A strange drama of the drug-smuggling trade, by the author of "Slaves of the Silver Serpent" and "A Thunderin' Thriller."

By Lemuel L. De Bra

THE night wind, springing up suddenly out of the west, caught the fetid odor of the tidelands and flung it against the man's face. Looking up from the salt-grass that whipped about his eager feet, he followed with his gaze the unkempt roadway that staggered down through the dumps and marshes to the tidelands—a sack-like bay of mud-flats that clung like some foul cyst to the clean shore.

On this bay, almost invisible against the muddy backwash of the tides, was a cluster of small, odd-shaped houses. Gray and storm-worn, cowering low over the mud-flats, they looked like a brood of huge crabs. One, however, seemed to stand apart from the other boathouses. About it there was a vague impression of neatness. Shutters hung over the small windows; a latticed railing inclosed the narrow veranda.

Quickening his pace, the man came suddenly out of the marsh to the black cesspool of mud. Here a narrow, bridgelike walk led from the marsh to the boathouse with the shuttered windows. Below the sagging walk, and on either side as far as the man could see, lay the treacherous mud and slime of the tidelands. As the man's weight assailed the walk, the viscous pool quivered like rotted jellyfish and sent up a hissing storm of bubbles.

Watching his step on the uncertain boards, the man's gaze chanced to fall upon the piles that held the boathouse above the overflow of the tide. They were unsightly things, old and rotting, black and slimy—a startling contrast to the neat boathouse they supported.

The sun gathered its last streamers from the sky and sank into the Pacific. Darkness fell like a merciful shroud over the ugly mud-flats. Only the vile stench that day and night hung over the tidelands remained.

THE man stepped across the veranda and rapped a peculiar tattoo on the snug little door. He stood for a moment with bent head and eager pulses, to catch any sound from within; and then the door opened. The woman stood in the doorway, smiling.

She was neither young nor old nor beautiful; and yet there was something poign-

antly alluring about her as she stood silhouetted in the yellow glow of an oil lamp that lighted the room behind her. Through half-closed lids she looked at the man, pleased yet amused by the hungry adoration that shone in his eyes, that was written in every tense line of his face.

"Rose," said the man, stepping in, "I got your note—and I'm here. I—I just had to come."

The woman laughed, a low, musical, carelessly exultant laugh.

"I knew you would, Joe. And I'm glad you did. There isn't any reason why you shouldn't—except that you get to acting silly."

He glanced quickly around the room. On the left a curtained doorway led into the kitchen; on the right was the woman's bedroom, the door closed. The man could not hide his pleasure at finding her alone; neither could he conceal the pain caused by her words.

"Silly?" he echoed. "Is it silly for me to love you, Rose, to want you to quit this crooked business, to marry me and go away?"

"Tut, tut! Let's not start that all over again." She motioned him to a chair by the table, and both sat down. "Come, Joe, tell me what you've been doing."

"Nothing." He shook his head with bitter emphasis. "And I've tried hard. A few odd jobs, of course. But there's nothing, it seems, for a man who—who can't hide the scars of ten years of hell across the bay.

"But I haven't given up yet," he went on quickly, raising his head. "I did ten years for another man's crime. Something is going to make that right. God—is still in His heaven, I believe."

The woman gave him a queer, half-startled look. From beneath lowered lids she studied his face. There was no sound, for a moment, save the viscid lapping of the tide against the piling.

"Well," said the woman at length, shrugging her shoulders, "if it's money you want—"

"I can't do that, Rose," he put in hastily. "I'll starve before I take a chance on going back to prison. There'll be an honest chance for me before long. I know it."

Again the woman regarded him a moment in silence. Then she leaned back and crossed her knees.

"You know, Joe, sometimes I think you've got a lot of sense. You'd get ahead, if you weren't so afraid. Right tonight, for example, I wanted to tell you how you could do me a big favor and at the same time make a hundred for yourself."

"What do you mean?"

"You know I always told you that some day Mart and I would quit this risky business? Well, we're going to put over one more deal; then we're through. Mart is going to get a job. I—I don't know what I'll do."

"Rose!" The name leaped from his lips. "You mean it?"

"Sure. We've made a little money. And you know the old story of the pitcher that went to the well once too often."

"But what can I do? I don't want your hundred. I want to do you a favor."

THE woman leaned toward him, one bare elbow resting on the table, and spoke earnestly. "Mart is sick. He's down at the doctor's office now. He can't get to the city. And the stuff is waiting. He should have gone after it several nights ago."

"Then, Rose, why not quit now? Why take a chance on another deal?"

"Because we've got a lot of money sunk into the stuff Chung has ready for us. You know you got to put up your coin first with these Chinks."

"Can't Chung bring it over?"

"He can, but he wont. He used to deliver regularly to us, but he's afraid now, and makes us go after it. We want to get this one batch, turn it over tonight—then Mart and I are through."

For a long moment the man looked down at the floor as though listening to the sucking gurgle of the tide. From shaded eyes the woman watched the struggle in his face, saw how he was torn between desire and fear—desire to serve the woman he loved, and fear of the prison he hated.

"It means a lot to me, Joe. It means a chance to quit this business for good. I think I'll go to the country some place. I'd ask you to help me if—if you weren't so afraid of prison."

"That's just it," the man declared bitterly. "All they got to do is catch me with the stuff in my possession—and I go over again. It's hell—even to think of it. . . . . But Rose, I—I believe I'll do it for you. I don't want any pay. I want to help you get out of this. Yes, I'll do it. I ought to be back in two hours. And when I come back—"

The woman laid a soft, warm hand over

his. "Joe, let's not bargain, you and I. But you ask me that—when you come back."

The man jerked out his watch and arose. "I can get a boat at nine," he said. "I ought to be back before eleven."

"If you are, my brother can make his deliveries tonight, and we'll be through with this business. He's too sick to make the trip to Frisco, understand; but he can make his deliveries."

The woman took a piece of notepaper from the table drawer and wrote hurriedly. "Just go to that address, ask for Chung, and see that he gets this. He'll give you the stuff. You can wear Mart's overcoat," she added, indicating a coat hanging by the door. Then she stepped through the curtained doorway into the kitchen, returning quickly with a small package. "You'll need this," she concluded. "I guess you know what it is."

The man had already donned the overcoat. "I ought to be back by eleven," he repeated, taking the package. "And when I come back—"

She watched him cross the veranda and hurry over the sagging walk into the gloom. Then she closed the door quickly as though to shut out the stench of the tidelands. For a moment she stood by the table listening. Then:

"Mart!"

The bedroom door opened. A heavy-faced man with sullen eyes stepped out. He spoke with low caution; yet his vibrant voice seemed to fill the room.

"Classy work, Rose."

The woman laughed.

JOE CARTERS left the Ferry Building in San Francisco and caught a Sacramento Street car for Chinatown. Alighting at Grant Avenue, he hurried north, turned off into an alley, left that for another, and presently stood before a cellarway lighted by a gas taper in a cracked mantle. Pausing only long enough to make sure of the number, he went down the steps and rapped on the unpainted door.

After a long silence the door was slid cautiously back, and the figure of a gaunt-faced Chinaman stood in the aperture. "Wha' you want?" he demanded suspiciously.

"I want to see Chung. I—"

"He go out."

Carters frowned in disappointment. Here was something he hadn't expected. On reflection, however, he decided the guard was lying.

"When will Chung be back?" he persisted.

"No *sabe*." The Oriental made to close the door.

"Wait a minute! I have a note for Chung. It is important. I must see him. Here!"

The gaunt-faced Chinaman took the note. "You wait," he said, and closed the door. When he returned a moment later, he motioned for Carters to enter.

The white man was led down a long, gloomy passageway to a room fitted up as a store and office. Over the stained counter was an enamel sign bearing the English words: *"Chung Hop, Tea Importer."* On the shelves were boxes and jars of various shapes and sizes. Seated on a stool back of the counter, writing with a long bamboo pen, was an intelligent-appearing Chinese dressed in well-made American clothes and wearing gold-rimmed spectacles.

" 'Lo!" said Chung in his clipped English. "You like buy tea?"

Carters looked around. The gaunt-faced Chinaman had disappeared. He was alone with Chung. "I guess you know what I want, Chung. You got the note?"

"Where you get note, eh?"

For an instant Carters hesitated. Then he realized that Chung, having never seen him before, was merely being cautious.

"*She* gave it to me."

"Where *she* live?"

Carters told him.

"Well," concluded Chung, after a long, searching study of the white man, "she left package here one time. You take it, eh?"

"Yes. I'll take it to her. She sent me for it."

Chung lifted the hinged end of the counter, and Carters stepped in. The two passed into a small room back of the office. "I don't know what in package, understand," Chung went on. "She friend mine long time. She say one day: 'Chung, you keep this; I come again.' I say: 'All right.' Understand?"

"Yes," smiled Carters. "I understand."

This room appeared to be a place for storage of tea-samples. On the floor and shelves were packages of all sorts and sizes. On one particular shelf, in plain view, were a dozen or more parcels wrapped in Chinese newspapers and tied with cheap twine. To Carters the packages appeared exactly alike. Chung stepped forward and with a

long-nailed forefinger indicated one of the parcels. "All right," he said quietly. "That's it."

Officers searching for contraband drugs would not be likely to give these packages more than a hasty glance, and would consider it a waste of time to open any of them. As a matter of fact, most of the packages did contain tea-samples wrapped in heavy tea-lead. It was one of the exceptions that Chung was pointing out.

AS Carters reached for the package, the Chinese drug-vendor glided swiftly out of the room. Never for an instant would anyone catch him with that package in his possession. He would die swearing that some one left it with him, and that he was ignorant of its contents. Nevertheless, Carters knew that the package contained narcotic drugs purchased by Rose and Mart.

With a nervous glance at the door Chung had closed behind him, Carters unwrapped the package. There were twenty flat tins sealed with wax, water-tight and air-tight. The label, printed in Chinese, meant nothing to the white man; but in one corner of each label was a small penciled *H*. Carters had seen this before on similar tins that Rose had shown him.

Unwrapping the package Rose had given him, Carters found a canvas belt fitted with pockets and shoulder straps. Each can fitted snugly into a pocket; and the whole, when filled, reminded Carters of a life preserver. When, a few minutes later, the ex-convict stood on Clay Street waiting for a ferry-bound car, no one would have any reason to suspect that beneath his coat, its suspicious bulge hidden by the loose-fitting overcoat, he carried nearly two thousand dollars' worth of contraband heroin, a drug that is similar to morphine but three times more deadly.

Impatient to be on his way, eager to keep his tryst with the woman who waited for him in that boathouse by the tidelands, Carters walked nervously down Clay Street, glancing back frequently at the cable car that was creeping so slowly down the hill. As he passed José's Place, at the corner of Grant, he saw a man step out of the swinging doors, a man whom he instantly recognized.

Carters kept going, trying to steady his trembling legs, trying to make his steps appear unhurried. Halfway down the block, he found the walk torn up and a temporary walk raised above a litter of building materials. He was carefully picking his way up the raised walk when a voice hailed him from behind—a voice that leaped back across the years and plunged a searing iron of bitter memories into the very soul of the man who heard it.

"Hello, Carters! What's your hurry?"

"Oh, it's Mr. Leinert! Why, how do you do! Glad to see you again. I—I was just strolling along while waiting for a car."

"Uh-huh! What're you doing since you got out?"

"Not much yet, Mr. Leinert. Just trying to get my bearings. Lots of things happen you know in ten years. You still on the force?"

"Sure. Where you living?"

"Oakland."

"What're you doing in Chinatown tonight?"

"Just come over to look around. Well, so long. Here's my car."

CARTERS started on, anxious to catch the car that was then crossing Grant; but a hand reached out, gripped his arm and brought him up short. "You know, Carters," said the officer with quiet insolence, "you act just like a bird sneaking out of Chinatown with a flock of hop. Aint dabbling in the dope business, are you? I think I'd better take a look—see."

Carters' heart all but stopped. His knees sagged, and he might have fallen but for the support of the board railing along the temporary walk. Why did Leinert have to appear on the scene just at that moment?

Many things flashed through the ex-convict's mind in the brief instant before the officer could raise his hands for the search. Those twenty cans of heroin would be found. He would have to go back to prison. More than that, through the drugs, the officers might implicate Chung, and through Chung—Rose! Carters himself would hang before he admitted anything that would implicate her; but he knew that the detectives had uncanny ways of tracing back such things. Prison terror fired his imagination. He saw the ruthless hand of the law reaching out to where the woman waited in that boathouse by the tidelands.

The thought filled Carters with a terrible bitterness. With all his faith in justice, it seemed that the cards had been stacked against him. Through no fault of his, he

had failed. And because of his failure, the woman he loved would have to suffer prison, as he had suffered it.

Unarmed, Carters did the only thing possible. Ducking low, he flung up his open hands and hurled himself against Leinert. The officer, caught off his guard, was thrown back against the temporary railing that was intended to keep pedestrians from stepping off the raised walk. The board, lightly nailed, gave way. Carters saw the officer land on his back on a stack of cement bags.

Down the street the ex-convict flew on the wings of a terrible fear. He heard a shout behind him, two quick revolver-shots, a command to halt. Just ahead, at the corner of Kearney Street, half a dozen men swung around and looked up toward Chinatown. Carters knew they saw him, knew they heard Leinert's shouts to head him off. Already a few of the bolder ones were running up the hill toward him.

On his right the fleeing man saw an unbroken row of Chinese stores, none of them offering an avenue of escape. On the left, across Clay Street, was Portsmouth Square. To gain its doubtful refuge Carters would have to run directly in front of Leinert. But it was the only chance. Carters took it. He sprang off the walk and cut at an angle across the street. He heard Leinert shout: "Halt, or I'll shoot!" But he ran on. The detective, for some reason, did not fire.

AT the edge of the park Carters dashed around a clump of bushes, raced across the grass to the graveled walk, and down the walk past the monument erected in the honor of Robert Louis Stevenson. The loungers in the park on this wintry night, instead of moving to interfere with Carters, belonged to the class that had good reason to scurry for cover at the approach of the police. He saw he could reach Kearney and Washington streets without trouble; but there he would be exposed to the glare of street-lamps and the interference of crowded traffic. Moreover, just across the street, gray and imposing against the starlight, uprose the Hall of Justice.

Swinging sharply to his left, the ex-convict headed up the hill again toward Chinatown. For a moment he thought he had fooled his pursuers; then a hundred voices, it seemed, set up the cry: "There he goes! That's him! Head him off!" Baying like hounds, the mob was close behind when Carters stumbled across Washington Street into a narrow and gloomy alley.

How long the hunted man dodged back and forth through the narrow streets and still narrower alleys of Chinatown, he did not know, but it seemed like an endless nightmare. The overcoat impeded his movements; the belt with its burden of drugs cramped his chest as though to crush the breath from his body. None too strong after his years of imprisonment, it was not long before his legs felt numb and heavy, and his chest was torn with racking pains. And always there was that shouting mob at his heels; and, springing up before him, the startled rabble of the streets—some scurrying for cover, others trying to head him off.

HE stumbled finally into the dimly lighted rear entrance of a cheap American hotel on the outskirts of the Chinese quarter. Here, for the first time, he had a moment when he was out of sight of his pursuers. Stripping off his overcoat, he flung it into a dark corner. Quietly he began climbing the rear stairs. He had dragged his wornout legs halfway up the first flight when he heard the mob outside.

A moment later heavy steps ran down the lower hall. There were excited voices, evidently questioning the night-clerk—then triumphant cries. The front stairs, the rear stairs, trembled with the eager steps of pursuing men.

Carters had gained the second floor, but there his legs refused to carry him farther. The pain in them was torture. His breath came in hoarse, staccato gasps, stabbing his torn lungs with an agony that was all but unendurable. He could not go on; yet he knew he must go on.

At the head of the stairs he saw a door. Dragging himself to the door, he tried the knob. The door opened. In the dim light from the hall behind him he saw a chair and a bed, unoccupied. He went in, locked the door, and dropped into the chair.

The one window of the room was closed. Knowing that remaining in the room would merely delay his capture, Carters stumbled across to the window, opened it and found a fire-escape. Below was a dark passageway leading to the street in front. He began climbing down the fire-escape, and a moment later dropped the breath-jolting distance from the end of the ladder to the cement walk, picked himself up, and walked out to the street—walked for the

simple reason that the tortured muscles of his legs absolutely refused to obey the brain's command to run.

On the street, Carters turned to his right. He did not look around; but with each painful drag of his legs he expected to hear a command to halt. The command, however, did not come. Evidently the pursuers were so certain they had him trapped in the hotel that they had not bothered to send a guard to the front exit.

His mind in a daze, Carters walked on, turning at every corner, but with every step getting farther away from that hotel. After a time he looked up and saw a cable car. It was going up the hill, away from the ferry, but Carters boarded it.

There were quite a few passengers on the car; and although Carters dared not look around to see, he felt that every eye was upon him. He knew his appearance would arouse suspicion. He was dripping with perspiration; his hands were black with grime from the fire-escape ladder. Moreover, with the overcoat gone, his other coat could not hide the bulge of those twenty tins of heroin.

A few blocks west of Chinatown, Carters left the car. Afraid to stop long enough to form a plan, he started down the hill toward Market Street. When he met a boy selling papers, he bought one. A moment later he boarded a ferry-bound car on Sutter Street, took a seat in front, and buried himself behind the paper.

As the big Sutter car roared into lower Market Street, Carters looked up at the clock in the tower of the Ferry Building. It was ten minutes past eleven. A boat would leave in five minutes. He alighted before the car had swung around to a stop, and walked quickly past two policemen who stood at the curb talking with a taxi-driver. To avoid buying a ticket, he got out a quarter, and forfeiting his change, dropped the coin into the box at one of the entrances.

There was the usual crowd waiting for the gate to open to go aboard the Alameda boat. Working his way around to a place near the gate, Carters got out his paper and tried to appear inconspicuous. It was now thirteen minutes past eleven. The boat must be late, Carters reflected, or the gate would be open. Back in Chinatown, Leinert had no doubt completed his search of the hotel, and had come to the conclusion that his quarry had slipped through the net. With dismay, Carters suddenly remembered that he had told Leinert he was living in Oakland.

At fourteen minutes past eleven the gate opened, and the waiting crowd hurried aboard. Carters, with some sixth sense of caution, sought the upper deck and sat down by the after-railing. There he could look down and see the people walking down the apron from the ferry slip to the deck of the boat. Should his Nemesis of hard luck show up at the last moment, Carters did not mean to be trapped on the boat. If Leinert walked down the apron, Carters could jump from the upper deck to the pier slip.

At eleven-seventeen the apron was raised, the whistle blew, and the huge ferryboat moved ponderously out into the bay. And just at that instant Carters saw a commotion on the apron. Leinert and a uniformed policeman rushed down the gangway, shouted something at the deck-hands, then ran to the edge of the apron as though they intended to make a leap for the boat. But it was too late. The engine had picked up its speed; the great wheels were churning the water to hissing foam. Leinert and the policeman looked at the departing boat for a moment, then turned and left.

Carters was too utterly exhausted, his brain was too stupid with deadly weariness, for him to be conscious of any particular sensation of relief. He had escaped, he told himself, because it was right that he should escape. The world owed him a new deal; and he would get it.

AFTER a time he went below and sought a warm corner over the engine. Goat Island had been left behind, and the ferryboat was nearing the Alameda mole, when he aroused himself and went forward. It was a clear night, brilliant with a myriad stars; and against the starlight, the Berkeley hills stood out sharp and distinct and jeweled along the shore line with countless lights. Something about these glittering lights shattered the stupor that had gripped the ex-convict's mind. What a fool he had been to think for a moment that he was safe! He was in a trap! In the time that it took the boat to cross the bay, Leinert had ample opportunity to telephone to the officers on duty at the Alameda mole. They would be waiting for the ex-convict when he stepped off the boat.

With perhaps an idea of delaying his arrest, Carters went aft. The other pas-

sengers were going forward, and the after-deck was deserted. Carters leaned on the starboard rail and tried to think. He had made such a hard fight, and had been so close to winning, that defeat now was mighty bitter. The thought came to him of throwing the belt of drugs overboard; but he dismissed it at once. Without the drugs he could face the waiting police, but he could not face the woman who waited for him in that boathouse by the tidelands.

Calmer now than he had been at any time since Detective Leinert's voice had leaped out at him across the years, Carters looked over the bay waters toward Alameda, and as he made out the row of lights that marked the long street leading down to the tidelands, a plan flashed into his mind. It was the only plan that seemed to offer any hope. He did not pause to consider its dangers. With a glance around to make sure he was alone, he stripped off his shoes and coat and threw them overside. The boat was less than fifty yards from the pier when the ex-convict climbed over the rail and quietly dropped into the churning waters in the wake of the starboard wheel. After the first shock of the cold water he caught his wind and settled down to steady swimming.

The crisp air, the invigorating sting of the salt water, cleared his mind; and something of his old faith returned to him. He had eluded the detectives at last. They would waste precious minutes hunting for him on the boat. Then they would reason that he had jumped overboard to swim around the pier to some dark spot along the mole, and they would hunt for him there. But they would never suspect that he had undertaken to swim from the boat to the tidelands.

IT was not long, however, before the stimulating effect of the cold water wore off and a reaction set in. Carters found his lungs aching, his legs and arms growing numb. At times he could not be sure that he was moving; and then he would struggle furiously for a time, for he knew that he must keep going, must keep his face toward that row of lights back of the tidelands. It did not occur to him that he might fail. He would win, because it was right that he should win. He had suffered ten years for another's crime; in some way that terrible wrong against him would be made right. God was in heaven; justice still ruled in the world.

All about him the icy water tossed in dark, smothering waves. They bore down upon him, barred his progress, dashed the breath from his face, beat him cruelly. But he was no longer conscious of pain or cold or weariness. He was but an automaton struggling blindly through the water, his staring eyes fixed on that row of lights that led down to where the woman waited in that boathouse by the tidelands.

Afterward, hours afterward, when brain and body were all but paralyzed, when there remained only the sublime faith, the unconquerable will of the man, he saw rising up before him a line of small, odd-shaped houses almost invisible against the background of marsh and mud-flats. From one of the boathouses, one that lay some distance to his left, a dim light fell through a shuttered window and across the latticed railing that inclosed the veranda. Carters changed his course, and struggled on. The water was quieter here, for this was the backwash of the tide. He gained the boathouse, wrapped his stiff arms about a slimy pile, and looked up at the edge of the veranda.

FOR a long moment the man clung there, trying to think what he should do next. His brain seemed incapable of thinking; yet he realized subconsciously that he dared not pit his exhausted legs against the treacherous mud along the shore. Neither could he cling long to the piling for it was wet and slippery with foul accumulation. Already he was slowly sinking beneath the water, his feet burying themselves in the muddy bottom. Gradually, to the exclusion of everything else, his mind became fixed on the edge of the veranda where the dim light fell through a shuttered window. Bringing every shred of his remaining strength to the task, he gripped the slimy pile, tore his feet loose from the clinging mud, and raised as far as he could out of the water. When he had braced his knees against the pile, he let go with his arms and made a leap for the edge of the veranda. His fingers caught barely an inch over the edge, and slipped off.

Again Carters sank beneath the water, and the viscid mud closed in a tenacious grip about his feet. Frantically he dug his nails into the slippery piling and tore his feet free. Again he looked up at the edge of the veranda; but he knew now that he was too exhausted to reach it. He was fast slipping beneath the water. The mud was

pulling him in deeper and deeper. Gripping the slime-wet timber with the last ounce of his strength, he raised his eyes to where the light fell through the shuttered window. "Rose!" he called out in a hoarse whisper that barely rose above the lap and wash of the tide. "Rose! I made it! I—"

A WHITE porcelain-shaded lamp stood a little back on the kitchen table. Within its circle of light sat two people, busily manipulating small squares of white paper. The man took the squares from the stack and spread them on the table before the woman. Then from a tin bearing a Chinese label, he took tiny heaps of white powder and placed them on the papers. The woman's deft fingers folded the papers once, twice and again until each was about the width of a cigarette. Then, bending up one end, she tapped the other with the nail of a forefinger until the powder settled into a compact package. The other end was then folded down, and the folds meshed. The finished "bindle" was dropped into a cigar-box.

The man looked at his watch, as he had done many times during the past hour. "Strange he doesn't come, Rose," the man's vibrant voice drummed out. "If he got pinched, we'd better be ready to take to the woods."

"Don't worry, Mart. He'll never squawk. He isn't that kind. And I don't think they'll get him. He's a fighter, you know; and he's scared of prison."

"Maybe it'd be a good thing for the poor devil if he went back to stir for a short trick."

"Maybe so. At least I'd be rid of him for a while. Still, if he hadn't been so nutty over me, I couldn't have used him tonight to pull chestnuts out of the fire for you. But I'm afraid he's going to learn some day that you're not my loving brother and—"

A sudden trembling of the boathouse brought the two to their feet. The tin of heroin, the papers, the box of "bindles" disappeared magically into a hollow space back of the table drawer. And then came a peculiar tattoo on the door. The woman, with a puzzled look at her companion, went to answer it.

" 'Lo!" said Chung in his clippped English, stepping in. " 'Lo everybody. S'prised see me, eh?"

"Well, I'll say so," replied the woman. "What's up? Did you get my note?"

"Sure. That's why I come. Ver' funny thing. That man—he come yet? No?" Chung laughed. "Ver' funny."

The woman spoke up sharply. "Say, Chung, get it off your system quick! What has happened to the man I sent to you for the stuff? And what brings you here at this hour?"

Chung laughed again. "Lots trouble Chinatown tonight. I think your friend go to jail, maybe. Everybody chase white man. See? Ver' funny. Now you listen:

"My partner ver' jealous man. See me make money, he wants it all himself. What you think he do? Ver' funny. He take all white drug out of tins and run away. I find him gone. Wonder why. Bime-by, after your friend gone, my number one boy get scared. He tell me all about it.

"So I come quick to see you. Make explain. You good customer mine long time. I give back your money. Bime-by I get more white drug for you."

"But the man I sent with the note—"

"Ver' funny," laughed Chung. "P'lice chase him all over Chinatown. He got twenty tins in belt. Nothing in tins but rice-flour."

Beneath the boathouse, within sound of the woman's careless laugh, Joe Carters' stiffened arms still clung around the slime-wet piling. His legs were sunk deep in the clinging mud. His head was flung back as though his eyes still sought the edge of the veranda where a light fell through the shuttered window.

But *above* that unbowed head lapped the foul backwash of the tidelands.

Safety First

Which paradoxically deals with a stolen box of dynamite, a pay-roll robbery and sundry other wholly unsafe things.

By George L. Knapp

THE fashions which men set live after them. Twenty-five hundred years ago, a gentleman named Æsop started a style that worries authors to this day. Mr. Æsop found that he could put over any sort of cock-and-bull story by fitting it out with a "moral"—a little tag of practical wisdom or pious sentiment fastened on at the end of a yarn. Since his writings had and still have a great vogue with children,—and since adults are always much concerned with the ethical welfare of children,—the custom spread; until now any story dealing with or intended for youngsters is counted incomplete unless it has a nice, handy little moral tied to its tail.

The history of two young scapegraces hereinafter set forth contains a moral; I am sure of that: but I don't know what it is. Perhaps, however, the reader can find it.

Chicago, as everyone knows, was founded on a bed of swamp muck, which may or may not account for the prevailing character of its politics. As one travels in any direction from the "Loop," that iron-banded business center of the city, he approaches the edge of this ancient muckhole. Going southwest, he soon passes the swamp-belt and reaches a region where the underlying limestone rock shoulders its way to the surface, and is quarried in vast quantities for various uses. This geological fact forms the basis of my story.

Out in this quarry region, beyond the city limits and not far from the Drainage Canal, is a village which for the purposes of this story may be called Mound City. It contains about fifteen hundred people, of five or six racial stocks, though the native American element is stronger than in many suburbs. In addition to these folk whose forebears came from New England, New York and Pennsylvania, there are Germans, Lithuanians, Poles, Scandina-

vians, a few Italians and a couple of Irish families. Many of these people, especially the Lithuanians and Italians, work in the quarries; the two Irish families supply the police. The community is prosperous, decent, rather self-satisfied and prior to the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, it prided itself on obedience to law. It boasts three constables, four churches, one high school, one bank and a paid fire-department; and no social worker in the big city near by ever has pointed to it as a horrible example. If you are familiar with social workers and with the villages that lie near to great cities, that is description enough.

ON the edge of Mound City, in two frame houses set well back in the half-acre lots which only village dwellers and millionaires can afford, lived Jim Bailey and Louis Kodis. Jim was the son of an American railway conductor—a tall, eager lad, prone to devise brilliant schemes which he never carried into effect. Louis, better known as Lew, was the son of the Lithuanian foreman of one of the nearer quarries —stolid, stocky, practical and persevering. Together they struck a pretty good balance, and apparently realized this, for one seldom saw them apart. At the date of this history they were twelve years old, neither unwholesomely good nor discouragingly bad—just ordinary kids, glad that school was over, and wishing that vacation might last forever.

The first Monday of their new freedom found them lying out on a warm knoll in the Higgins pasture—a stumpy, rolling tract surrounded by thin woodland, with an abandoned quarry at one end and an abandoned private road angling across from that quarry to the State highway a few hundred yards farther north. This road cut through the knoll, instead of skirting it; and the boys were lying prone at the edge of the cut, saying little and thinking less. Jim suddenly started, and sat up.

"Lew," he said, "let's have a cave!"

"Un-nh," said Lew, whose northern blood was not easily roused to enthusiasm. "Where?"

"Right here on the bank," said Jim, —"under this stump."

Lew got up and inspected the spot with a professional eye, as he had seen his father inspect a ledge of rock at the quarry.

"Be hard digging," he pronounced.

"But the roots'll hold up the roof an' keep it from caving in on us. Safety first, you know."

"Yep," assented Lew, who likewise had heard the Red Cross lecture on that subject which marked the final week of school. "All right; but you gotta do your share." Experience had taught him that Jim was more ready with plans than with performance.

"Of course!" returned Jim with offended virtue.

They went home for tools, and succeeded in assembling a digging kit without the knowledge of their families. Jim contributed a broken-handled shovel and a furnace poker. Lew found a forgotten grub-hoe. With these treasures they slipped away to the pasture.

The bank of the road-cutting was about seven feet high, and the stump to which Lew referred was a couple of feet back from the edge. The boys attacked the clay and gravel with their purloined tools, and for a space made good progress. As they worked in, however, the earth became harder to dig. Jim straightened up at the end of his "shift."

"Gee!" he said. "Them cave-men must have had a hard time!"

"What cave-men?" asked Lew. Jim was one of the chief patrons of the Mound City library, and the question launched him on an account that stopped digging till it was time to go home.

NEXT day they were back again, but the tools swung more slowly, especially when Jim held them. The work was really hard—they would have deemed it intolerable had it been a part of their chores around home. Jim picked up the grub-hoe for his last trick that afternoon with a growl.

"Wished we had some dynamite!" he said.

"Let's get some," was the unexpected rejoinder.

"What?" exclaimed Jim. "Where?"

"At one of the quarries."

"Where your dad works?"

"No," said Lew. "Might get him in bad if we took it from there, an' he might suspicion. Overman's quarry's nearer, anyhow."

"Say, that'll be bully! Let's do it!"

Work was suspended forthwith while they planned their raid. They carried it out that same night.

There is a predatory spirit in every boy

which serves him well—or ill, as you choose to look at it—when he embarks on forbidden adventures. Jim and Lew went at the job of stealing dynamite much more efficiently than their fathers could have done, for the lads were quite unembarrassed by any twinges of conscience. Neither of them would have taken money belonging to anyone whom he knew, and Lew was particular to avoid any chance of getting his parent into trouble. But to steal from that impersonal, distant thing known as a corporation seemed entirely natural to both of them.

They got permission to go to the movies that evening, ducked out of one of the side exits, made their way by alleys to the rear of their respective homes, gathered up the tools laid out that afternoon, and started. A walk of twenty minutes brought them to the rear of the Overman company's property, closed in by a high barbed-wire fence. Their burglar's kit consisted of a saw, a pair of nippers, a rope and a heavy chisel. The nippers were brought into play, not to cut the wires, but to draw out some staples. This done, they held the wires apart for each other, and crawled through, stopping inside to listen. They heard nothing save the rustle of a summer night, and addressed themselves to the next move.

"Careful, now," whispered Jim. "Remember, safety first."

Lew nodded. They skulked noiselessly through the weedy grass till they reached the shed where the dynamite was stored. A little scouting assured them that there was no watchman. The shed door was padlocked and the windows barred, but they had expected this and were prepared.

"Gimme a back," whispered Jim.

LEW stepped to the corner of the shed and bent over with hands on knees. The lighter, taller Yankee lad climbed on the sturdy back, reached up and caught the roof. One quick spring and a wriggle landed him on the gentle slope. Lew passed up the tools; and with the aid of the rope, he climbed up himself.

"All right," he whispered. "Let's get busy."

The shed was covered with a prepared roofing that comes in sheets. Using the chisel, the boys ripped away several square feet of this without difficulty or noise. Underneath they found a board insecurely nailed.

"Bully!" exclaimed Jim. "We wont need the saw."

With the chisel they pried loose and lifted the board—then stopped and lighted a candle which Lew shielded from observation with his hat. "Ready?" he asked. Jim nodded and lowered himself, feet first, into the black hole they had made—then remembered that he did not know just what was beneath him, and with Lew's aid, climbed up again. Holding the candle as far down as they could and shading their eyes, they inspected the interior of the shed. The floor just under them was clear. Jim let himself down again and dropped. His springy knees took up the slight shock, and he straightened instantly.

"All right," he said, "Hold the light over this way while I get a box."

Lew obeyed. One box of dynamite was open, but it contained only two or three sticks, and Jim ignored it. Guided partly by Lew's directions, he selected a full box and brought it beneath the hole in the roof. With somewhat more difficulty, he found a box of percussion caps; a coil of fuse was in plain sight; and standing on the dynamite, he handed up these to his companion. Lew laid the fuse beside him on the roof, stowed the caps in his breeches pocket and passed down one end of the rope.

"Tie her tight," he admonished. "We don't want her to drop. It's safety first when you're handlin' this stuff."

Jim tied her tight, and then, standing on the box, jumped up, caught the rafter, and squirmed through the hole to the roof. Together they drew up the box of explosives, and lowered it to the ground outside the shed. They were about to leave, when Lew stopped suddenly.

"They'll spot your tracks in the dust!" he exclaimed.

"Jiminy! That's right!" returned Jim. "Wait." He dropped into the shed again, took the rope and raked it across all his footprints, then threw it up. Lew looped it over the rafter, Jim climbed up, then turned and swung the end back and forth till the marks of his last stand below would not betray him.

"Let's go," he commanded, and jumped down back of the shed. Lew tossed down the rope and followed suit—with the box of caps in his pocket.

Caps are the most temperamental things in the industrial world. It is hardly safe to sneeze violently in their neighborhood,

lest they resent the breach of manners by exploding. At times, however, perhaps of malice aforethought to lure fools to play with them, they exhibit a strange and surprising tolerance.

In Lew's case, likewise, the Fates were kind, or the devil which dwells in percussion caps was asleep, else there would not have been a whole pane of glass within five miles, and the Kodis and Bailey families would have been spared all funeral expenses. Lew seemed to realize that he had done a slightly indiscreet thing, not befitting a responsible person of twelve years. "Guess I hadn't better hop around any more with that stuff in my pocket," he said, but there was no nervousness in his tone. It was a trifling oversight, not to be repeated, of course, but nothing to fuss about.

THEY pried the box open with the chisel, and then, with the cord which every boy carries, tied the dynamite in two equal bundles and started home. Slipping up the back way they secreted their plunder in Lew's barn for the night, then went farther downtown and made their appearance at home from the front. It was past the time when they should have returned from the movie show, but that brought no more than a mild scolding to Jim and a grunt of disapproval to Lew.

Next morning they attended to their chores, and watching their chance, each carried his half of the dynamite into his own cellar. They had discussed the disposal of it before; Jim was inclined to hide it under the coal; but Lew pointed out that they might forget a stick in that way and feed it into the furnace next winter. To avoid any such danger, they laid it on the concrete foundations, next the sills, in the darkest parts of their respective basements. Lew could not find a place that seemed secure enough for the caps, so he laid the box of them on the furnace, pushed back among the hot-air pipes, out of sight. That done, each boy hid a stick of dynamite under his shirt; Jim wrapped some fuse around his waist; concealed in the same manner, Lew carried what caps they thought necessary for a day's work, and they set out for the Higgins pasture.

"What do ye suppose them little divils are up to?" queried Constable Reagan of his fellow cop on the day force as the lads went by on the other side of the street.

"Goin' for a swim, probably," returned Constable Welch, who thought the best possible of everybody. Reagan grunted.

"Mebbe," he said. "They look like they're schemin' mischief, to me."

Arrived at the cave, Lew, as the expert in explosives, took command. He thrust the furnace-poker into the clay at the back of the excavation, and worked it round till he had made a hole large enough to hold a stick of dynamite. This done, he cut one of the sticks in two, and Jim carried the surplus to a safe distance. Lew fastened the cap to the dynamite, the fuse to the cap, set the explosive in the hole prepared for it, scratched a match on his breeches in approved quarryman style, and lighted the fuse. Both boys streaked it for shelter. After a wait that seemed of minutes—Lew had cut the fuse a little long, they heard the explosion, and hurried back.

"Hooray!" cried Jim when he saw what had been accomplished. "That's the stuff," commented Lew. "It sure does the work."

They fell upon the loose dirt with the fire-shovel, and accomplished more in an hour than in the two preceding days. This was cave digging de luxe. They touched off another half stick, and left the loosened dirt lying while they went home to dinner. Home duties delayed them for a time; Jim had to wipe the dishes, and Lew was required to bring back something from the store; but even chores have an end, and they started back to the cave, making a detour through the main street of the town on their way.

AT the principal corner Officer Reagan was telling some important news to a little wisp of a man with gray side-whiskers and white hair, president of the village council and of Mound City's one and only bank.

"They just climbed on the roof, busted through wit' a crowbar or somethin,' went down inside an' helped themselves," said Reagan. "Took it away in an auto, I guess, 'cause they threw away the box. May have took more'n one box, though; the foreman aint sure."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the banker. "To think of such things happening right at our door! What do you suppose they want of it? Think they're bolshevists?"

"Well, I don't know what they be, but if you ask me what they mean, I'd say they took the stuff to blow somebody's vaults," said Reagan.

"Why, bless my soul!" exclaimed the

little man again. "That doesn't seem possible."

THE two boys wandered on, not daring to look at each other until safely round a corner. Then they broke into a run and yips of laughter at the same time.

"Oh, jiminy Christmas!" gasped Jim when they had reached a place where conversation seemed safe. "Crowbar or somepin! I'll tell the world it was somepin! Aint he the fat-head!"

"'Took it away in an auto!'" quoted Lew. "'Goin' to blow up somebody's vaults!' Say, did you see old Perkins get green around the gills?"

"Like to see 'em huntin' for that crowbar," said Jim.

"Guess he'll find he aint chasin' kids out o' the swimmin' hole now," said Lew with a return of dignity. "It's goin' to rain."

They cleared out most of the loose dirt before the rain came, accompanied by an increasing growl of thunder. When the big drops began to fall, they squatted in the cave and looked out across the moistening landscape. The stick of dynamite, brought in to keep it dry, lay behind them.

"Aint this bully?" demanded Jim. "I bet the cave-men didn't have anything to beat this. Wished we had a rabbit or somepin'! We'd build a fire an' cook it."

"Where's your dry wood?" returned the practical Lew. "Wonder if the roof'll leak."

"Naw," said Jim scornfully. Since the roof consisted of three feet or more of sod and clay, there was reason for his confidence. The thunder was coming nearer.

"It's goin' to be a good one," remarked Lew, peering out. As he spoke, there came a dazzling flash, and a bare half-second later a tremendous peal of thunder. Both boys sprang up, pale and gasping, the same terror staring from the eyes of each.

"The dynamite!" cried Jim in a choked whisper. "Beat it!"

Lew, nearest the cave mouth, went through it with a speed one would not have looked for in so stocky a lad. Jim dived after, but even as he did so there was a blinding glare of blue-green light, a rending, tearing crash, and he tumbled to the bottom of the cut, thinking that the end of all things had come. Yet somehow, after a lapse of seconds or minutes,—he could not guess which,—some one was holding his hand and dragging him through a cataract of rain to the shelter of a tree. His eyes cleared, and he saw that his rescuer was Lew.

"Did she go off?" he asked feebly.

"No," said Lew. "Gee, that was a smasher! You tumbled on your head."

"Gosh!" said Jim. He felt of his head, almost wondering to find it still attached to his shoulders, and repeated the remark. Then he thought of something else.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "We gotta keep that powder somewhere outside the cave! We'll get blowed up if we don't."

"That's right," said Lew. "We'll stick it in that hollow tree over there. Safety first!"

The rain stopped more suddenly than it began, but the boys had no mind for further cave work, and went home. Next day their spirits revived, and they came back. The stick of dynamite which had caused their terror still reposed quietly at the back of the cave, and the roof had not leaked. Jim enlarged his plans.

"We'll run her back here," he said, kicking a stump eight or ten feet back of the first one. "Then we'll make a hole in this stump, an' use it for a chimbley when we build fires. Say, wont that be bully?"

"Maybe," returned Lew.

Thereupon they shot the remaining stick of dynamite, but it shook down some of their roof. They shored it up with some boards, and for a few days gave up any further excavation.

NOW, these things happened in that halycon period following the war when the world tried to jazz itself into prosperity, and when those who could not earn the price of a dance, or collect it by legal methods other than earning, went out to take it, pistol in hand. The "wave of crime," a newspaper phrase for a generation, became a grim reality everywhere. Different cities developed special tendencies in lawbreaking; and Chicago, being an industrial community, naturally specialized in pay-roll robberies. Most city workmen nowadays are paid every Saturday; the law requires payment to be made in cash, this cash has to be brought from the bank, and of course is peculiarly open to attack while in transit. As a consequence afternoon newspapers grew to expect at least one pay-roll holdup as regularly as Saturday came round, and the office-force of one newspaper used to lay bets as to the quarter of the city in which the raid would occur.

With these things in mind, the reader will not be surprised to hear that while Jim and Lew were giving a glad imitation of the cave-men, four strictly undesirable citizens, ranging in age from seventeen to twenty, gathered in the rear room of an ex-saloon on South State Street to plot the betterment of their fortunes. One was called Al Johnson, his real name being totally different. One whose school name was Ernest Muller answered to the title of Soupy Diggs—"Soupy" because of an early and too successful experiment with nitroglycerin, the "soup" of the underworld, and "Diggs" because he once tunneled his way out of the reform school. A third was Bat Murski, the only one of the quartet who sailed under his own "moniker." Last but far from least came Sam the Poke, who began earning a living by lightening the "pokes" or wallets of female shoppers. He had climbed the ladder of crime from moll-buzzing to banditry, and was by odds the brainiest villain of the four. He was explaining to the others the system to be followed in annexing the payroll of the Bubbly Creek Manufacturing Company.

"There's about ten thousand beans in it every week," he said. (It averaged something over six thousand dollars, but for a thief, Sam was unusually accurate.) These guys think they're awful slick, an' they been turnin' into the alley. They got to slow up to do it—see? An' then's when we get 'em. Croak 'em both if they bat an eye. Then we streak it out the Chisholm Road, slip into a pasture Dan showed me when we was figurn' on stickin' up that quarry last spring, an' lay low till the bulls go by. Then we comes out on the country road an' jogs back to town, license-plate in place again an' all regular—just been out for a picnic. Some stunt, eh?"

"I'll tell the world it is," said Bat admiringly. An expression that was half a snarl and half a grin flickered over Johnson's pasty face as he offered the only suggestion made:

"Better croak the guys anyway. The other fools will stop to look at 'em an' run for a doctor, and give us more time."

ON the Saturday following this conference Jim and Lew decided to resume digging, carry the cave back to the second stump and try the plan of a chimney. Both mothers had gone downtown; the lads ate a cold lunch before noon, and by half-past twelve were entering the Higgins pasture, each with two sticks of dynamite under his shirt. As before, Lew carried the caps and the fuse. They turned aside from the direct road to go through a thicket and estimate the outlook for blackberries a little later in the season, and were just ready to emerge from this when Jim exclaimed:

"Oh, Lew, look!"

A high-powered black touring-car was backing into the pasture from the Chisholm Road, backing as if it had come from the city and run past the opening. The man on the ground who had opened the gate closed it in a hurry and wrapped a chain around gate and post, just as it had been before. He sprang into the car, which swept down the old quarry road at a remarkably rapid pace. It entered the cut—and did not come out.

"W-what do you suppose that means?" asked Jim. Lew shook his head. They crouched in the brush and waited. A man came up on the knoll at the other side of the cut, looked around, called something which they could not hear to his companions below, and disappeared again.

JIM, as usual, decided upon the plan of action.

"Come on," he said. They skulked, stooping, through the brush until they got to a position where three trees intervened between them and the cut, then stalked forward with the best skill they could muster till Jim reached a clump of weeds at the entrance to the cut, perhaps forty feet from their cave. He could see the car, but not the people, and though he caught the murmur of voices, he could not hear what was said. He backed away cautiously, rejoined Lew, and the two of them crawled up behind the second stump, the one they were going to use as a chimney; then ventured a little past it. A querulous voice came from below.

"I tell you, I smell soup!" it said.

"Well, what of it?" The boys did not know that Johnson was speaking, but they recognized the menace of the tone. In a moment that menace took the form of words.

"I've croaked one guy this morning, an' I can croak another—"

"Cut that out!" Sam the Poke did not propose to have any shooting-matches at this juncture. "You're too damn ready wit' your rod. Them guys must of had some of the dough hid in the car; there's

only fifty-two hundred berries here, besides change. Well, that makes thirteen hundred apiece—not so bad. Watch me count it."

THEY watched him, not realizing that Sam had managed to slip out a package of bills containing close to a thousand dollars. Lew and Jim crawled back, rose to their feet, and ran behind the tree that had sheltered them in the storm.

"Did you hear?" Jim's eyes were blazing. "They're robbers! They've killed a man, an' robbed a bank, or somepin'!"

"I bet that's the cops after 'em now!" exclaimed Lew as a loaded auto dashed past the gate opening to the Chisholm Road at a terrific pace.

"They've killed a man!" repeated Jim. "Lew—gimme that dynamite!"

"What!" exclaimed Lew excitedly. "You mean—"

"Yes," said Jim. "Gimme the sticks an' stuff."

"Take the sticks," said Lew. "I'll bring the rest." Down they went on their bellies again, crawling to the second stump. Into a gopher-hole between the roots Jim poked the four sticks of concentrated destruction; Lew packed them in, fastened caps and fuse and drew out a match.

"Let me!" whispered Jim. Lew shook his head, waited till a voice was raised in the cut below, and struck the light on his breeches.

"There's been soup around here! I can smell it!" Diggs' voice was sharp with alarm.

"You'll smell more in a minute!" exclaimed Jim in a whisper. "Quick!"

THE Mound City police force had been informed of the Bubbly Creek robbery by telephone, and requested to watch for the car which carried the brigands. Half an hour later they got another message, bidding them close the Chisholm Road to all traffic at once. By this time Sam and his companions would have been fifteen miles away, had they kept on going; but Reagan and Welch could not know that. They seized the village auto, and knowing well the old road across the Higgins pasture, took that as the shortest way. They were just inside the fence when the knoll ahead of them heaved up its shoulders, a big stump sailed skyward, opening into fragments as it rose; and cutting across the thunderous report of the explosion came a shriek of terror. Two boys ran out from behind a tree, and peered at the place where the mound had been. Reagan swore and stepped on the gas. In another minute he was shaking Jim by the shoulder, while Welch performed a similar service for Lew.

"What the divil d'ye mean, ye young hellions?" demanded Reagan. "Ye've killed somebody, I'll bet! Ye've scairt that poor chap to death, anyways. Hold on, there, boy; they wont hurt ye anny more!" For Soupy Diggs, who had suffered least from the explosion, was reeling, staggering, but making very good time toward the road. Jim turned a white, scared face to his captor.

"They're robbers!" he said. "They've killed a man an' robbed a bank. We heard 'em, Lew an' me, an' we blew 'em up! They're robbers!"

"What!" yelled Reagan, dropping Lew's shoulder and drawing his club. The dust had settled, and he ran to the edge of the much-widened cut. Sam the Poke, buried to the waist, with blood running over his face from a cut in his scalp, a sharp pain in his leg and his companions unconscious beside him, looked up and showed his scorn at the chance that had beaten him.

"Well, you tall-grass bulls, don't stand there rubberin'! Get down here an' dig us out!"

AS I remarked before, this story certainly has a moral, but for the life of me I can't tell what it is. The whole business of the dynamite-stealing came out, of course; Jim's mother went to bed when she found where the stuff had been stored; but his father—and Lew's—remained up and active. If one could stop at this point, "Don't keep your powder dry in the cellar," would fit the case pretty well. When domestic ceremonies were over, the boys were escorted to the Juvenile Court, and that scared them worse than the thrashings hurt. "Honesty is the best policy," would do very nicely at this stage, or "Suck the eggs but hide the shells," or something of the sort. But the Bubbly Creek Company insisted on paying Jim and Lew half the reward offered for the capture of the bandits. Obviously they never would have got that reward if they had not stolen dynamite—and how do you tack a moral to a situation like that? The only thing I can do is to repeat the boys' own maxim of "Safety first," and leave the question open.

Sheriff Dan Doud

The modern West has its wild moments and its bad-men—as witness this thrilling novelette by a man who knows the West well.

By Frederick R. Bechdolt

CHAPTER I

ONE afternoon not so very long ago, when whisky was beginning to soar and cartridges were worth nearly their weight in gold if you got them down into the right part of Mexico, Under-sheriff Ed Hurlburt was talking to Bolton, the superintendent of the Najo Mine. And while they were standing there in Najo's narrow street, which wound like a pack-trail up the sides of the steep gulch commanding a wide view across the international boundary, a large red touring-car which was speeding over the plain to the south of them crossed the line and approached the lower end of the camp.

As he lounged with one foot on the running-board of the county's automobile, young Hurlburt made a handsome picture. But the neatly pressed trousers, the pongee shirt and the tie which he was wearing would hardly have fitted in with the expectations of many persons who look for hair chaps, guns and bandana handkerchiefs on their border officers. He was speaking earnestly to Bolton, but he kept his eyes on the red car.

"I'll take the matter up with Dan," he said at length. Bolton smiled cynically, which was his usual way of smiling.

"Hope you've more influence with him than the Company, then," he answered. "We've been trying to get a deputy here for six months, and you'd think the Sheriff would be interested in helping us out. Why, man, there are more than two hundred Mexicans and Yaquis working on the road-job this minute, and Lord knows how many renegade bandits among 'em. It's only luck that's kept us from having serious trouble long ago; but all we get out of Dan Doud is promises."

"Say," Hurlburt interrupted, "that's a fine car." Bolton allowed his eyes to stray in the direction of the accompanying gesture and nodded indifferently. The machine was now ascending a far-flung loop of the road which lay directly beneath them.

"Chances are," the mining superintendent said dryly, "it belonged to some American company south of the line within the last few months. Good cars have found lots of new owners in northern Sonora lately."

THE car vanished under a bluff, to reappear a few moments afterward in front of the shaft-house—upon the roof of which one could have dropped a stone from where the deputy was standing. From force of habit Hurlburt found himself watching two men who were climbing out from it. One of them was, beyond dispute, a Mexican, and even the colored goggles which he was wearing against the glare of the sun did not hide the patrician quality which the faces of some upper-class natives of the southern republic possess; there was a suggestion of the military man in his waxed mustache. The other passenger's face and badger hair-cut proclaimed a coarser type and one whose habitat was more northerly—a half-breed, the deputy decided at first glance, probably a cowboy, one of the sort who go in for creased fedora hats and loud-colored ties on holidays and are to be found at such times in the nearest wet town. Even from this distance one could see that his eyes were set unpleasantly close together.

When the pair had entered the shaft-house Bolton resumed his plea for an officer at Najo, but Hurlburt cut him short by climbing into the county's car.

"Tell you what," he called by way of farewell, "I'll come over to that roping contest in Old Town next week and look out for things myself, just to make sure there isn't any trouble." He nodded over his shoulder, shoved down the gear-lever, let in the clutch, and the auto began to climb the grade. Roaring, it followed the steep loops and crossed the summit of the range a thousand feet above the clutter of pine buildings with its purlieus of adobe huts wherein the Mexican and Yaqui laborers dwelt. Half an hour later it was spinning down-grade on the other side, toward another tawny plain, with the walls of the range between it and Mexico. Here lay Old Town, half deserted, silent, like an aged man who has seen livelier days, asleep at the mountain's foot. Hurlburt drove at top speed through the place and came out on the flat over which the shadows of early evening were stealing like swift, stealthy spies.

A few miles farther on, and he saw a battered Ford emerging from a dry wash ahead of him. As he drew near, he sounded his horn to pass, and the Ford pulled off to the right. He was shoving his foot down on the accelerator, bringing his own car back to the crown of the road, when he glanced at it. It was just such a Ford as you might have seen on any Arizona or Nevada cattle-range, with a brass-bound radiator and stray wisps of baling wire dangling from various portions of its anatomy. His eyes went to the two men on the driver's seat, and then he swore aloud. For there was but one road—by which he had driven—across the mountains here; no car had passed him; and yet that pair, whom his glance had caught in the midst of what appeared like a bitter argument, were the men whom he had watched in front of the power-house at Najo less than an hour before.

"I'll just let those fellows catch up," he determined when he had driven another mile or two, "and I'll ask them where their shortcut is." He stopped his car and looked behind, but the Ford, instead of following the highway, had turned off on a by-track which led northward along the course of Hackberry wash toward the railroad fifteen miles away. He got one or two glimpses of its dilapidated top bobbing up and down among the mesquite thickets, and started on once more.

SPEEDING on toward Chiracajon, the county seat, Hurlburt continued to ponder over the incident, for in a country where whisky smuggling was a profitable method of lawbreaking, a country where gun-running and the illicit Chinese immigrant traffic had long since built up a network of secret highways, such matters as this were decidedly interesting to a sheriff's deputy. He was still trying to solve the problem when he met Sheriff Doud in front of the old courthouse which the county had built away back in the days when homicide and stage-robbery were regarded as the only criminal matters worthy of official attention.

The Sheriff shoved back his old-fashioned wide-rimmed hat, revealing a close thatch of grizzled hair, and propped his lank form against the trunk of a walnut tree from whose limbs an enthusiastic delegation of citizens had informally hanged a trio of stage-robbers during the town's hectic youth. He had a peculiar habit of letting the lids drop over his eyes when anyone faced him with a sudden question or broached an unexpected subject. When Hurlburt recited to him the mining superintendent's plea for a deputy at Najo, he stood there leaning against the tree like a man fast asleep.

"Don't reckon the commissioners will stand for it," he said; and before Hurlburt could get in another word he turned the talk abruptly to his own affairs.

"I'm rushed plumb off my feet," he declared. "Been having the house all gone over. I got a wire, after you left this morning, telling me my niece gets in on tonight's Limited—and I never looked for her till tomorrow noon. That means I've got to drive over to the Junction and fetch her here. And the's a dozen other things I ort to see after."

With which he departed, leaving Hurlburt smiling at his discomfiture, for Doud had been keeping bachelor's hall in his big house on the hill for twenty years, and the expected advent of his niece had been the subject of more than one quiet jest on the part of the younger man, who thoroughly understood the perturbation which this visit was causing his chief. For his own part, Hurlburt had no particular interest in the event. Chiracajon had long since passed the stage where women were in the minority, and a good-looking fellow still in his twenties had no need to long for importations. Doud's tall figure had vanished in the darkness before he remembered his failure to convey that important information concerning the mysterious shortcut through the mountains from Mexico.

CHAPTER II

IF a rawboned little Mexican steer had not chosen the roadside for his bedding-ground that night, this story would probably have turned out differently. But the steer made his decision to sleep in the ditch just where the Lordsburg Road enters the hamlet of Bagdad Siding from the east. Everyone who has driven over the ranges of the great Southwest is thoroughly familiar with the proceeding which took place when this benighted animal saw the headlights of Curt Wilcox's car bearing down upon him.

Curt Wilcox was driving about as fast as usual, which was as fast as his little cut-down Ford could make it without leaving the road. What errand had taken him over into New Mexico, whence he was returning at this late hour to Chiracajon, was never told me, but you who read must rest assured that there was no dishonor about Curt's business. In those days when all sorts of queer customers were traveling along the international border, and when solid citizens were oftentimes making nocturnal journeys on various dubious errands, Curt drove his small car unchallenged by officials, just as he had ridden his saddle-horse over the same ground in the good old days before internal combustion motors. For men had long since learned that any time they found him mixed up in trouble, they knew on whose side the right lay. As he had carried his rifle in its sheath under the stirrup-leather during former decades, so now he carried it slung along the car body. And somewhere or other, handy to grasp if occasion should arise, there was a forty-five single-action revolver. In this degenerate age of barbed-wire fences, dry farming and drier laws, Curt managed to find some solace in hunting down smugglers for the Federal government, and the weapon still came in handy. Besides, it is hard to wean a man from art when art has become a part of his very being—and Curt was an artist with firearms.

THE dash-light revealed his face as he came speeding along the dusty road; there was something in the lean features and the fierce gray mustache which suggested a brooding eagle. He pressed his foot on the accelerator, which he had added to the mechanical equipment; and now, as the little car roared with cut-out muffler past Bagdad Siding, the steer did what was to have been expected.

Curt caught sight of the lumbering form of the steer as it came into the road ahead of him, and both of his hands got busy with the steering-wheel. The speedster swerved off at a sharp angle; there was a moment of uncertainty when it was nip and tuck as to whether the collision would be averted. The auto bounded across the ditch just as the bewildered cause of the trouble decided to back-track; it crashed right through a soto bush and passed like a leaping jack-rabbit over several large malapi fragments, skirting disaster by a scant foot. During that moment Curt's eyes took in something beyond the immediate scene wherein he was one of the main actors.

The change of course had turned the headlights full upon the railroad, and in the brief time while the radiance was sweeping over the station buildings, the grizzled driver caught sight of a man near

the water-tank. It was just a glimpse, and it came during an interval that was overflowing with action, but Curt was used to seeing things when other things were happening, and his brain registered the man's actions indelibly—not only his actions but his general appearance. There was something about the latter which did not look right, something about the manner in which the fellow wore his hat slouched down over his eyes, something in his bearing, which went well with the way he leaped back into the shadow of the water-tank when the lights fell upon him.

Curt brought the little car back into the dusty road and sped on at his accustomed hair-raising pace. By the time the steer which had brought about this diversion had calmed his harrowed feelings and sunk to bovine rumination in the ditch, the speedster was nearing the dry wash where the highway crosses the right of way under the railroad trestle. Most men—even most Arizona men—would have slowed up here, but the old-timer knew the turn to a nicety, and he took it at a clip which would rouse the envy of a racing driver.

As he was climbing the rise beyond, he got another brief vision which probably would never have roused his suspicions if it had not been for the one which he had had back there at the station. Several men were lying in the brush beside the road; he thought he saw the barrel of a rifle gleaming under the bath of radiance which his headlights poured upon the spot. He drove on at undiminished speed. At times like this it does not do to betray one's discoveries.

But when he had gone another mile, he withdrew his foot from the accelerator and groped for the leather holster wherein his rifle always astonished newcomers when he parked his car in Chiracajon.

"IF they're figgerin' on standing up the Limited," he said to himself, "I got a show to play a lone hand against 'em." His spirits rose, and something like joy shone in his eyes as his mind went over the topography of the landscape behind him, for he recalled a certain low butte within two hundred yards of the trestle.

"I can sneak back and—with them in the light when the train comes along, why—" His reflections went no farther, and the gladness vanished from his eyes, for the hand that was groping for his rifle encountered an empty sheath. When he had finished what sounded like an intoned chant of considerable length—

"Reckon," he concluded, "it done jumped out when I turned off for that fool steer." A forty-five revolver, which is an admirable weapon under some circumstances, was never designed for night shooting at two hundred yards against high-power rifles. Curt's right foot came down hard on the accelerator. More than half an hour yet to train-time, taking it for granted that the Limited was on the dot, which was rarely the case.

"Offer up a silent prayer that the's been a hot-box," he bade himself, and turned off northward toward Bill Savage's horse-ranch, where there was a telephone. This should give Ed Hurlburt a chance to show what he was made of. For three years Curt had counted the under-sheriff as his friend; and in his code, friendship was sacred.

"He can make it as quick from Chiracajon as I can make it from the ranch. And if she's late, we'll be on hand for the party. If she aint, why, we got a hot trail, anyhow." He made the little car jump now.

CHAPTER III

CURT'S silent prayer was unavailing; there was no hot box. The Limited came thundering down the long grade to Bagdad Siding on time to the second by the engineer's two-hundred-dollar watch.

"Yas'm," the porter in the second Pullman informed Charis Hilton, "Chiracajon is the nex' stop after this. Bresh yo' off?' He did it so expeditiously that he had departed for the vestibule with her bags before the train was again in motion.

All the other passengers were within their curtained berths; hers was the only section not made up. She sat there in her neat dark tailored suit pressing her face against the pane, striving to see something of this Western land for which she had longed ever since she was a little girl with two braids dangling down her back. She wondered what Arizona was really like; would there be anything left of the storied old West in this corner of the State where she was going to abide for the next few months? She fell to speculating as to her Uncle Dan; would he resemble those Southwestern sheriffs of whom she had

read? She was inclined to doubt it, from his letters; somehow business stationery and typewriting did not seem to fit in with the conventional idea of Arizona man-hunters. Anyway, there would be open country and horseback riding; he had promised her that much. The faint light from the car's interior shone through the window on patches of brush and intervals of stony earth, but revealed them only as blurred shapes and dark pools of shade. She was straining her eyes in the endeavor to see more, when the train's speed slackened abruptly.

The slouch-hatted man who had boarded the blind baggage at Bagdad Siding without anyone's seeing him had climbed over the tender during the period of Charis Hilton's musings. First the fireman and then the engineer had discovered him behind his big revolver-muzzle; and now the latter was obeying his terse orders. The air-brakes clamped down; the wheels shot spark-showers into the night; the Limited came to one of those sickish stops which send brakemen forth and set passengers to wondering.

Dark forms emerged from the mesquite. The front brakeman encountered one in the shadow of the express-car and backed away before a leveled revolver, then recovered himself at the robber's sharp bidding and hurried on forward to uncouple the locomotive. Under the muzzle of the slouch-hatted fellow's weapon the engineer opened the throttle, pulled on for half a mile and stopped again.

AND now, while Charis Hilton was gazing out of the Pullman window, fretting at this delay which had come in the last few minutes of her long journey across the continent, the robbery was carried out according to the fashion which the James brothers originated away back in the days when the Civil War was a very recent memory—the fashion which has endured throughout the West up to the present.

The express-messenger had smelled trouble when the train's speed first slackened, and he was standing within his car, carrying out the traditions of his calling, ignoring the demands from the outer darkness to open the barred door. These demands ceased. There followed an interval of silence during which the conductor came hurrying from the rear coaches. A man, who seemed to rise from out the earth with a revolver in his hand, confronted the startled trainman, whom he ordered back with a curse.

"And I'll go along a ways, jest to see you-all get there," the bandit added.

By this time three of the gang were at the door of the express-car, and they seemed to know their business. Before the messenger had finished a profane defiance to their offer not to harm him if he opened up without more delay, they were sorting out giant powder, caps and fuse. During the next few moments one near by could have heard a sound very much like the spitting of an angered kitten, and little jets of red sparks rose near and nearer the barred door. The ensuing explosion fairly lifted the car's roof, and Charis Hilton fell away from the Pullman window with a frightened cry. The voices of awakened passengers began to come from behind the berth curtains. The porter appeared in the aisle; his face was ashy gray.

"Better yo' come away from that window, miss." He touched Charis on the shoulder. "This heah—" A fusillade of shots up forward made him end the warning with a thick gasp of fright.

She had pressed her face to the pane again, and when he spoke she was withdrawing—not so quickly, however, as to prevent her from seeing two men passing outside, surrounded by a pool of radiance which moved along with them.

One of the pair she recognized as the conductor; the glow from his lantern bathed both figures. The other fulfilled some of the promises that fiction had given her of the West. His hat was slouched well down over his eyes, but the eyes showed with the light glinting on them—black eyes, shallow, and set close together. The coarse, dark features were revealed; she saw the loose lips shaping themselves to words which she knew must be curses. If she lived a hundred years thereafter, the imprint of that face would remain in her memory. There was something in its cold wickedness which chilled her.

So now she obeyed the warning of the porter and drew down the shade; and a period followed which seemed to her to be well-nigh interminable, a period during which nothing at all happened within her knowledge, save the intermittent questions of her fellow-passengers and the answers of the porter, invariably the same in every instance.

" 'Sall right. Jes' a little delay. I don' know what."

CHAPTER IV

IN Chiracajon the telephone system has not yet grown to the point where operators are mere impersonal vocal presences, chanting certain brief fixed responses, knowing naught of whom they answer nor heeding his woes. The switchboard girls, on the contrary, are a living portion of the community and take a lively interest in such of its goings-on as pertain to their service. Particularly they have learned to follow the movements of those men who are apt to be summoned to the wires on business. They have developed this faculty to the point where one might term them expert trailers, knowing not only how to find a man by tracing him from one point to another, but—what is more valuable—whether he would want to be found on the particular occasion in question.

Ed Hurlburt was not only well enough known in the town to be easily tracked down, but the operators all liked him, which means much when it comes to serving clients. So all Sheriff Doud needed to do that evening when he wanted to get into communication with his chief deputy was to call central and tell her as much. There was a peculiar vibrancy in his tone which made the girl quite certain that there must be another shooting-affray over in the Whetstones at the very least. She lost no time in getting to work at nosing out a scent, but in her haste she forgot another fervent summons for the deputy which had just come from the Savage ranch.

So it happened that when Hurlburt was coming homeward from a meeting of the Chiracajon Good Roads Club, a meeting whereat the locally important subject of inducing the county commissioners to appropriate some tens of thousands of dollars to build a segment of the southern transcontinental highway had been enthusiastically discussed, the proprietor of the corner drug-store on Main Street was keeping one eye open for him.

"Oh, Ed," the druggist called from his cash-register, which was near the front door, "you're wanted on the phone."

"Just a moment, Mr. Hurlburt," the operator bade him as soon as she heard his voice. "It's Sheriff Doud." From the manipulations which he heard while he was waiting, Hurlburt knew that the call was long-distance.

"That you, Ed?" Doud's voice held more than common urgency. "Well, I want you to drive to the Junction and pick up my niece. You'll just about have time to meet the Limited; she's late tonight. Charis Hilton—that's the name. Fetch her to the house and tell her I'll show up later on. I've been called away on business and couldn't make it." He had hung up before there was opportunity for reply.

IT was not until Hurlburt was breaking the local speed ordinance in Chiracajon's main street and making the few pedestrians abroad wonder what was up now in the way of criminal business, that he began to think of the young lady who was to be his passenger. Probably, he told himself, she would be like the general run of Eastern girls who came out this way—a believer in gun-toting cowboys, and something or other the matter with her lungs. Sheriff Doud had not said anything about her looks or personality, but had always spoken of her with a certain vague perturbation, as of one whose advent meant a complete upsetting of his free and easy life's routine; and unconsciously the undersheriff had come, from this fact, to regard her as a necessary infliction about to be imposed upon his chief. When a man is young and owns his full share of hearty good looks, living in a town where the girls outnumber the youths, he is very apt to become a little finical on the subject of the fair companions whom he takes out for evening drives.

Hurlburt was a long way from enthusiastic over this errand which had been imposed on him; but just the same, he did his best to see that he did not keep a young lady waiting at the lonely little junction station, and the big car tore down the winding highway with a roar. The Limited was just pulling in as he made the last turn a few hundred yards from the depot. By the time he had stopped, the porter was helping down the only passenger to alight at the junction. There was therefore no chance for mistake, and the deputy hurried across the platform with his hat in his hand, failing to notice the badly shattered express car.

"Miss Hilton?" She had her back toward him as he asked the question.

"Yes." She turned from tipping the porter and confronted him. "I'm Miss Hilton." And he knew at once that there was nothing wrong with her lungs. Also

he realized that her presence in Chiracajon was not going to be an infliction on anyone. These things took him quite by surprise and left him, for just a moment, disconcerted.

She did not fit his conception of Eastern girls at all. A little thing, with a tumbling crop of golden brown hair which was not smoothed back as he was accustomed to seeing girls' hair, with a face as mobile as sunbeams, and blue eyes which took quick sidelong regard of him, a regard not altogether devoid of humor, as if she were ready to stifle laughter if he gave it the slightest excuse to arise to her lips—that was Doud's niece.

"I was sent to meet you," he told her gravely, for he had not quite regained his assurance. "The Sheriff was called away on business. I'm his chief deputy." He saw a flicker of surprise in her eyes, and then he heard the station-agent calling him.

THERE is usually something in a man's voice which proclaims bad news before he delivers it, and as Hurlburt turned away from the girl, he knew that trouble was in the wind. The conductor was hurrying across the platform with the agent.

"Curt Wilcox," the latter said when he had finished telling of the holdup, "is down at Bagdad Siding now. I got the wire just before the train pulled in. They're raising a posse."

"I told 'em all there is to tell," the conductor interrupted, "and we're away behind time." He was signaling the engineer with his lantern as he spoke.

"See to this lady's baggage," Hurlburt bade the agent. "I'm going in to phone."

"They've been trying to get you for the last hour," the telephone operator told him. "It's Mr. Wilcox. He put in a call from Savage's first, but Sheriff Doud told me to get you on the line for him." Hurlburt mentally cursed his chief's untimely press of business which had been the means of preventing Curt's message from coming through. Then the old-timer's voice reached his ears.

"Hit her up's hard's you can, son," Curt bade him. "Don't bother looking for help in Chiracajon. I've got some good men here, and I done phoned the jailer; he's trying to get holt of Doud. You just burn up the road, for we've got a hot trail."

Charis Hilton was waiting for him in the car when he came out of the depot.

"I'm ready," she announced. "I knew you'd be in a hurry." He leaped to the seat beside her, and as he was starting the motor she went on to describe the face that she had seen passing the Pullman window. "If," she added with a little diffidence, "that will be of any help to you."

"Yes," he answered, "it sure will be of help to me." In his mind's eye he was seeing the face of the half-breed cowboy whom he had passed in the battered Ford.

"I wish I'd been able to get a better look at him," she continued, "but the porter insisted that I take my head away from the window, and to tell the truth, I was beginning to be afraid."

"There are a great many girls," he told her, "who would have been too badly scared to see as much as you did." He had shifted into high now, and the car was roaring up the first grade. As if such affairs as train holdups came every day, she changed the subject.

"Do you know," she said, "you're a complete surprise to me. I thought that deputy sheriffs—" She hesitated.

"Yes," he said, "what about them?"

"Well, I'd read of them, you see, and I'd gotten my idea from that, I suppose—that they wore pistols out West and were—well, not so young." She did not add the information that her conception of Western deputies failed to include his particular sort of good looks; but she smiled so frankly that he took his eyes from the road long enough to smile back at her.

"We manage to keep our guns concealed," he told her, "and as for being young, why, time will fix that if you only wait around long enough."

There was something in her manner—a way she had of meeting him right on his own ground, as if the fact that they had just seen each other for the first time made no difference at all—which caused him to go on talking quite as though they were old companions. By the time they had climbed the grade, he had learned that she liked horses; and when the car had passed Robbers Rock and was speeding through the hills, he found out that she rode astride like a real human being.

"But English saddle," she added, "with curb and snaffle."

"That's easy to get over," he assured her; "and as soon as I'm through with this rush of business, I'll look up a good pony for you."

She thanked him and took mental note of the way in which he had referred to the

train robbery. "This rush of business!" Evidently such matters were a part of his life's routine. She remembered the look she had seen in his eyes when the station-agent had announced the news. And she began to think that perhaps, although he did not wear the chaps and the ragged mustache, this new and neat edition of a Western under-sheriff might have something of the old West in him after all.

A few minutes later they were passing through Chiracajon. When he had stopped before the Sheriff's gate, Charis Hilton opened the door and leaped to the ground.

"I can look out for myself," she cried. "You hurry."

"Sensible girl," he reflected as he drove away; "and she's got a mighty nice way with her, too."

CHAPTER V

HURLBURT drove out of Chiracajon, as the saying goes, like a shot out of a gun. Eastward he sped, down from the mesa to the wide mesquite flat-lands; and as he came on, with the big touring-car reeling under him like a drunken locomotive running amuck, he caught sight of the reflection of a pair of headlights in his windshield. The road forked just ahead; it would be nip and tuck as to which reached the fork first.

"Give her all she'll stand," he bade himself, and shoved his foot down hard on the accelerator.

The motor's roar set the night air all ashiver. The mesquite bushes within the lighted area beside the road came racing out of the shadows, passing rearward in a never-ending mad procession. Jackrabbits at play in the highway's dust leaped forward in frantic endeavor to outdistance the monster which was bearing down on them, and saved themselves at the last moment by whipping off into the ditch. Hurlburt glanced behind; the other car was falling back a bit. He shot into the highway less than fifty yards ahead of it, and he noted its headlights—a yellow no-glare lens which was just coming into fashion hereabouts.

"Now, who'd be making time like that?" he pondered. "I wonder if it could be Dan?" In Chiracajon there were only two automobiles equipped with those orange headlights; the Sheriff drove one of them; and Lewis, his junior partner in the hardware business, the other. Young Lewis was no nighthawk, but kept his nose-glasses intent on business always.

"Anyhow," Hurlburt reflected, "if it's Dan, why, he'll catch up with me when I strike the bad ground by Hackberry Creek."

HACKBERRY CREEK lay a few miles ahead of him. When he reached the top of the winding grade, Hurlburt slackened his pace, and he crossed the gravel stretches at its foot in intermediate. Even at twenty miles an hour the car slewed so badly in the loose rubble that it seemed as if it were surely going to skid over the bank into the stream bed. He brought it back into the roadway and started up the opposite hill; and now he glanced behind at the other car. Either it did not own the power—which seemed hardly likely to be the case after the recent speed exhibition on the level—or the driver lacked nerve. Doud was as reckless at the steering-wheel as the average old-time Arizonan, which is saying a good deal.

"Doesn't look like 'twas Dan," Hurlburt concluded. He felt a sudden throb of thankfulness. During his three years in office he had not gotten a chance at a big felony case but had been obliged to content himself with risking his neck chasing such small fry as bootleggers. Doud's being out of town tonight had given him a longed-for opportunity.

It was not that he wanted to encounter danger for its own sake so much as that he wanted to show a number of people what he was made of. The liking which men in Chiracahua had for him was tempered only by the fact that he belonged to the new generation, the generation which wears negligee shirts and neatly pressed trousers instead of flannel shirts and pants tucked into one's boot-tops; and the old-timers, as a rule, were inclined to be skeptical concerning the courage of an officer who was brought up in this later era.

"Lessee what he'll do when lead's a-flying," was their way of putting it. Hence his gratitude to Fate for letting him go forth without his chief.

HE gained the top of the grade and put on more speed. A mile or two farther on he noticed that the reflection of the strange car's headlights no longer shone on his windshield. He looked around; the road behind him was empty. Where he

had crossed Hackberry Creek, the wagon track, which the Ford had taken at its other end, branched southward to join the Najo Highway. It occurred to him that, whoever that driver was, he was surely anxious to cut across country, for he was going to find some extremely rough going by this route. Probably it was Dan Doud, after all, he concluded, with some fresh information which led him toward Old Town.

When Hurlburt stopped beside the Bagdad depot platform a few minutes later, he made out the forms of several men in the darkness beside the building; a rifle-butt thumped on the planks; a self-starter whined in the darkness, and headlights glared upon a dusty ranch road which branched off here into the south.

"Six of 'em, and they've rode away on saddle hosses." Curt Wilcox placed one foot on the running-board and threw open the door. "They're heading for the mountains."

"Pile in, boys," Hurlburt called, and two cowboys tumbled into the rear. Curt took his place beside the under-sheriff on the driver's seat.

"Done dished a wheel coming down from Savage's," he said, "and I'll have to ride with you. Hit her up, son." As Hurlburt was complying in a manner to raise an ordinary citizen's hair, the old-timer leaned over close to him and shouted his information through the roaring of the engine.

"The boys in Bill Savage's car ahead there done followed the trail as far as Lathrop's ranch while you was coming. It takes off there angling towards the mountains. Looks like they're figgerin' on makin' the pass near Najo; it's the only country where hosses can cross down to Mexico."

"If that's the case," Hurlburt answered, "the Sheriff's got them headed off, ten chances to one, for I think his car followed me out of Chiracajon and turned south by Hackberry Wash." As he spoke, he felt a little bitterness at Doud. Why couldn't the old fellow have signaled him with his horn to stop, and told him his plans?

"Thought I could drive," Curt called back to the cowboys in the rear seat a moment later, "but Ed's got me beat. He goes acrost country like a drunken Indian." The big car swept back into the road after taking a cut-off through the brush, stealing the lead from the other auto. It charged through an open gate, across a pasture and on for several miles of rolling country until the lights of Lathrop's ranch house showed ahead of them. A cowboy appeared among the corrals with a lantern.

"Done caught up the hosses," he announced in the soft dispassionate drawl of his kind.

HURLBURT managed to borrow a pair of chaps before the posse were in the saddle. Curt showed him the fresh trail of the bandits where it left the roadway, swinging toward the base of the mountains, which rose, a black wall against the starry sky. They rode at what would seem to a tenderfoot to be a snail's pace, for they knew the limitations of horses, and the country before them was rough; the chase promised to be a long one—unless, as Hurlburt had reasoned, Sheriff Doud was in that car with the yellow headlights which had cut across country toward Old Town.

The first light of dawn was beginning to steal across the dark summits of the mountains when they came out on a brush-clad plateau overlooking the plain. Old Town lay a quarter of a mile away, hidden by the tall mesquite. Curt dismounted for the fourth time to scan the hoof-marks of the fugitives' ponies. When he had studied the earth for some moments, he looked up at Hurlburt and shook his head.

"Thought so a mile or two back," said he. "One at a time, after the Mex fashion, they've done turned off. Last one left here. They've split up and aim to meet som'ere where they've agreed." He caught sight of the disappointment in the younger man's eyes. "Don't worry, son. Half of the trailin' is guessin' where the other fellow's headed for, and these *hombres* are *ridin'* to Mexico. The Najo Pass is the only way across the range. We'll make for it."

THEY started on through the mesquite thickets, and were almost in the ruined outskirts of Old Town when a voice hailed them. A glare of yellow light fell upon them. Sheriff Dan Doud stood before his car, his eyes closed like a man fast asleep.

"Heard the news in town and drove over to head 'em off," he said, "but no one's done showed."

"Well," Curt Wilcox demanded, "how about it? The trail peters out a quarter of a mile back, but I think they're headed for the pass at Najo."

"Not a chance," Doud snapped. "They'll never try that road." And those who

watched him saw his face grow strangely hard. Then Hurlburt recalled the incident of that afternoon and the description which Charis Hilton had given of the bandit with the conductor. He broke into the discussion with his information, but Doud silenced him with an abrupt gesture.

"Aint no such shortcut," he growled, "and we got no time to waste around here. Back-track! They've done headed for Wild Rose Cañon."

It was at this juncture that Curt Wilcox—for the first time in his long life—resigned from a man-hunt, and the thing took place which set the old-timers in Chiracajon to talking long after the train-robbery was forgotten. For Curt couched his resignation in these words:

"Any man that says a hoss can come within five hundred feet of the summit of Wild Rose is a liar; I quit."

And when he had delivered that ultimatum to one who had earned in his day renown as a gunfighter, Dan Doud merely allowed the lids to droop a little farther over his eyes and made no answer.

CHAPTER VI

TWO days later Hurlburt returned to Chiracajon to take over the civil work of the office, and Sheriff Doud remained out in the hills conducting the man-hunt alone. The exchange of responsibilities left but one inference, and people were not slow in catching it—Hurlburt had fallen down on the job. What hurt him more than Chiracajon's taking this view of the matter was the Sheriff's willingness to put him in what he felt was a false position. Somehow, he could not help feeling, there was a hidden motive for Doud's actions. Something was going on here which would, he hoped, come out some time; but meanwhile it made an ugly mystery. For Wild Rose Cañon held no tracks of horse or man.

What Chiracajon thought of the matter might have troubled Hurlburt less if he had learned it under different circumstances. But the news came to him in a manner which did not tend to ease the smart of his humiliation.

It happened in this way: On the afternoon of his return to the county seat, Hurlburt thought to find a little solace by calling on Charis Hilton, and he made the pony, which he had promised to look up for her, an excuse for the visit. Bob O'Donnel, one of the deputies, had a well-gentled bay mare which he had been wanting to sell for some time, and Hurlburt struck a bar, gain with him. He had a Mexican trusty at the county jail groom the little animal and bring her up to the Sheriff's house, and so timed his own visit that he might arrive soon afterward. He found Lewis, Doud's junior partner in the hardware business, by the gate explaining the mare's good points to the girl.

Now, Lewis was a pushing young fellow with a loud voice, nose-glasses and a large amount of confidence in himself. He had come to Chiracajon from somewhere in the wilds of Kansas City, and had taken entire charge of the Sheriff's hardware business. No one in the town had as yet conceived any deep affection for him, but he made up for this by bestowing a great deal of love on himself. Doud stuck to him because his father was an old friend. Having been in Arizona for four years, he now felt himself to be a seasoned Westerner and capable of explaining to newcomers such matters as local history, the cattle business, mining and broncho-busting. When engaged in this sort of thing he was accustomed to forsake the Middle West dialect on which he had been brought up and to talk after the manner of those admirable characters in fiction who say everything in the present tense. This and the archaic idioms of the eighties which he employed on such occasions gave his speech a certain hairy and rugged character not at all in keeping with his appearance.

"Yes," he was saying as Hurlburt came up, "she's a right good bronc'. Reckon she gives you-all a mighty fine ride. Whoa, there!" He was exploring the depths of the pony's mouth with an inexpert hand and managed to dodge its protesting head in time to greet the deputy.

"Hello, Ed!" He turned away from the animal not at all unwillingly. "How come you-all lets those desperadoes get away?" Hurlburt managed to ignore the question, listening to Charis Hilton's thanks; but the respite was a brief one.

"They tell me Dan sends the hull bunch of you home and plays a lone hand now." Lewis thrust his beaming face between him and the girl. "How about it, ol'-timer?" Hurlburt saw her eyes take a quick sidelong regard of the speaker, and noted the amusement in them. Then she turned to him.

"I hope you'll be as nice in keeping the rest of your bargain with me and take me out riding soon," she said.

"Indeed I will,"—he was smoothing the mare's forehead as he answered and the animal was nudging him with her muzzle—"just as soon as I get the chance. Daytimes I'm being kept busy in the office, but I thought—"

He was going to suggest an evening canter on the morrow, but Lewis was there before him.

"Tell you what," he cried. "Now I've got a hoss and outfit, and I can make out to give you-all a ridin' lesson tomorrow afternoon, Miss Hilton."

IN the face of such competition Hurlburt felt himself beaten from the start, and before he had been there five minutes he had drawn out of the conversation, leaving Lewis to assume proprietorship of the pony and all that pertained to it. And with the injustice of youth, he was blaming the girl for not having saved the situation. Seeing this, as women always do see such things, she felt enough resentment to let him leave without overmuch protest on her part.

So it happened that the next afternoon, in the midst of a grind of civil business, which he had always despised, Hurlburt took his eyes from the papers on the broad desk before him long enough to glance out of the window and see Charis Hilton riding past the courthouse in company with Doud's brisk young partner. The sight did not make him any the more kindly disposed toward the world in general and the Sheriff of Chiracajon in particular.

That was not all that was on his mind. The memory of the half-breed with the close-set eyes bothered him; he knew the species; he had handled several of them since he had been an officer—the breed who have an insatiable appetite for another man's beef, and like nothing better than making easy money by peddling smuggled whisky. The mysterious shortcut through the mountains back of Najo was another problem of which he could not rid himself.

The office-work proved to be a formidable grind. According to their agreement after the last election, Doud was to attend to these civil matters; he was getting old and wanted to find another who was capable of handling the larger criminal business. Thus far Hurlburt had done well in seeing that the county was kept comparatively clean when it came to misdemeanor cases. Holding his nose close to legal documents was not in his line, and as a consequence he was getting but little time to himself. At first he contented himself by doing the best he could in daytime and letting the unfinished tasks pile up in the pigeonholes. But when he had made two after-supper calls at the Sheriff's house, only to find Lewis in possession of the front porch on each occasion, he took to toiling by lamplight.

"Mr. Lewis," Charis told him at the second visit, "has promised to drive me over to Old Town to the roping contest." Her face was all alight with anticipation, which made Hurlburt all the more sour when he thought of how he had hoped to ask her to come to the *rodeo* as his guest. When he got back to the office, he made up his mind to break his promise to Bolton and let Old Town look out for itself.

BUT his plans did not carry in this respect. It was old Curt Wilcox who changed them. He came driving up to the courthouse in his cut-down Ford on the evening before the roping contest and limped into the office in his high-heeled boots.

"Well," Hurlburt demanded, "what's on?"

"I'm driving over to Old Town," Curt answered in the soft, slow drawl which is beginning to go out of fashion in the Southwest. "Come on along."

Hurlburt shook his head and pointed to the littered desk.

"You passed your word to Bolton," the old-timer reminded him. But the undersheriff consigned the mining superintendent to a warmer climate than the Mexican border by way of answer.

"Suits me," Curt grinned, "and back again. But I've got an idee it might be sensible if you'd keep that promise. And anyhow, I want to have a talk with you."

"Sit down." Hurlburt waved him to a chair. "Do your talking here. I'm listening."

"I'll do it on the road," Curt persisted, "and you'll take my advice. Since I pulled out and left you at Old Town, I've done been figgering."

Hurlburt looked up into his face for some seconds. "All right," he said at length, "I'll come." He shoved back the chair and closed the desk. "Reckon I can get back and finish up this work in time."

Curt's little car was making life miser-

able for all quiet-loving citizens in Chiracajon's main street before either of them spoke again, and this time the old-timer's remark was irrelevant to what had gone before. He jerked his thumb in the direction of the lighted windows of Doud's hardware store, and the deputy got a glimpse of young Lewis within the place.

"Doing a heap of business there lately evenin's," was Curt's comment.

THEY descended the hill and began crossing the flat southeastward toward the ragged mountains. Now the gleam of other headlights showed before them; and as they traveled, more lamps appeared on byroads, flitting through the mesquite thickets like speeding fireflies. It was evident that the roping contest was going to draw more spectators than usual this year. Curt took one hand from the steering-wheel and pointed off to the range to the south of them.

"Find any trail in Wild Rose Cañon?" he asked. It was the first direct allusion to the bandit-chase that he had made. Hurlburt shook his head.

"A burro couldn't cross the range there," he answered grimly. "I don't know what Dan was thinking of when he sent us off that way."

"Why," Curt demanded, "didn't he take me up on it when I called him a liar?"

"Well, when it comes to that," Hurlburt told him with that rancor which a man likes to heap on a friend when others are harassing him, "he showed the only good sense he did in the whole affair. You can't go to shooting people up nowadays just because you don't like their way of doing business, you know."

"Things would be a heap better if you could sometimes," Curt growled.

The speeding headlights were showing thicker on all sides of them now. There was no doubt of it; the whole country was turning out.

"Going to be a big dance tonight," Curt shouted, twirling the steering-wheel while he took a shortcut through the bear grass. "Thought mebbe there might be some of those fellows showing up around the aidges. I've seen it happen. That's what I aimed to tell you—that, and to advise you to keep an eye on Dan Doud."

"Dance—and white mule," Hurlburt reminded him, ignoring the remark about the Sheriff. He smiled into Curt's eyes, and Curt smiled back. White mule got its name in part from its color and in part from what those who consumed it termed a healthy kick. The old-timer was quite unconsciously passing the back of his hand across his lips; and the deputy realized that if he were going to hunt down any bootleggers tonight, he would hunt alone. Here was a matter where friendship ceased between them, for Curt belonged to a generation which was not brought up to recognize misdemeanor laws. Some minutes later the little car shot abruptly around a corner and entered Old Town's main street.

CHAPTER VII

THUS it was that the two friends came to Old Town hoping to find some sign of the half-breed with the close-set eyes, hoping also—but each from a widely different motive—to run down bootleggers.

In former days the place had been a promising mining camp, but the Najo Company had bought up the properties and was operating them from the opposite side of the mountain. Most of the adobe buildings had gone to ruin. Only a dozen or so of inhabitants remained the year round, and the annual roping contest, wherein rival punchers from the adjacent villages participated, was the only event which ever brought outsiders hither. Tonight it was as if Old Town had been reborn. Lamps glowed from windows which glared empty upon passing travelers throughout the rest of the year. The abandoned hotel was doing a brisk business with cots set up in the cobwebbed hallways. A trio of barbers had opened their establishment in a shack whose yawning roof revealed segments of the star-flecked heavens. The strains of an accordeon and two fiddles were coming from the long warehouse before which the mule-drivers used to stop their teams to load ore for the smelter. Cars were parked all along the street. Groups of men were gathered in the lighted places discussing the morrow's events, politics and prospects of good feed on the ranges. Other groups were whispering in the shadows, and from these came odors which would bring an internal revenue agent a long way.

Curt's small car dashed into the thick of the traffic, dodged in and out among men and vehicles and came to a halt as abruptly as a cow-pony. The old-timer and Hurl-

burt climbed forth from opposite doors and exchanged a brief glance.

"See you later," Curt said. "So long," the deputy replied, and they were off on their separate quests.

HURLBURT set to work with the apparent laziness of the born officer who masks his eagerness by an elaborate assumption of indifference in every indolent movement. Now, as he lounged from group to group, nodding to acquaintances, shaking hands with friends, allowing himself to be buttonholed by those who sought him, he felt very much as a boy feels who has been kept in after school and is just released. This was his business, and he liked it. All the instincts which had been lying dormant during those days inside the office were awakened once more.

Occasionally Hurlburt noted one or another seeking to avoid him; now and then he caught the murmur of voices off in the shadows, and with the sound, came the pungent odor of jackass whisky. Always he passed on his way, giving no sign of his discovery; he was not looking for customers treating their friends; his quest was for the source of supply itself. If he could but find that, he felt that he would have a quiet laugh at old Curt's expense the next day when they went home together. Also he remembered that the half-breed bandit wore the earmarks of those who are to be found close to a moonshine still whenever one is working in the neighborhood. Two hours passed; he had been called down to the dance to eject a pair of overboisterous visitors; he had separated a pair of bellicose miners just before the fists got to flying; and he had taken a knife from a drink-crazed Yaqui. He had combed down the town, from the can-littered gulches at the lower end to the last steep side-street on the mountain's flank, and all to no result. Undiscouraged, he started on another round.

IN the meantime Curt Wilcox was having his own troubles. One cannot hunt with the hounds and run with the hare—not if the hare has anything to say about the matter. Curt was handicapped by having arrived in town in company with the officer. Of those men who knew him from the old days and realized his oft-proven ability to mind his own business, there seemed to be none on hand tonight. Mere acquaintances, for the most part newcomers, had no conception of a code of honor which will make a man keep his lips sealed in the presence of a friend. By the time he had circulated from the dance to the upper end of the street and back again, he had found nothing more interesting than the chance to get a fight with one or two detractors of Ed Hurlburt, who were using the recent fruitless chase of the bandits as political ammunition against the under-sheriff. And Curt never fought unless it was really worth while.

So the old-timer was feeling somewhat disconsolate and was very much inclined to sit down by himself and curse the degenerate days into which he had fallen, when he happened upon Uncle Dave Bascom near the head of the main street. Uncle Dave's years were nearing the four-score mark, and his accustomed demeanor was a bitter, brooding silence, for Fate had been unkind to him in his last matrimonial venture. But tonight he had discarded that usual demeanor as a man throws off an old coat, and joy enwrapped him. He was coming down the hill with a spring in his ancient limbs and a fire in his eye.

"I am," he announced fervently, "the man that butted the bull off'n the bridge. Who be you, anyhow?"

Curt ignored the question. "Where did you get it?" he demanded.

UNCLE Dave took him by the arm and pointed up a narrow rock-bound gulch which emptied into the main cañon at this point.

"Foller the bed o' the wash till yo' come to a big rock. Turn to the right, and there y'are. Four bits a throw, and it'll peel the hide off wherever it touches." He departed caroling, and Curt plunged into the darkness of the gully. Not more than twenty paces brought him to the rock which Uncle Dave had described, and he made the turn according to directions. Some fifteen minutes later he came forth, having attained the consummation of his hopes.

Fate so willed it that Ed Hurlburt had turned off into the byroad and was picking his way in silence through the darkness just in time to run fairly against his friend at the gully's entrance.

"Hello, Curt," said he. "How's everything?"

Instinctively the old-timer passed the back of his hand across his lips as he answered: "Fine!" Being a good sportsman, he did not raise his voice above the deputy's

half-whisper as he said it, but continued on his way downtown.

Hurlburt smiled to himself and turned into the gulch. He walked slowly up the bed of the dry watercourse, allowing his eyes to become accustomed to the deeper gloom. It is one thing to find a place according to directions, and another to hunt it out yourself on a night as black as this one was. He knew that the moment he showed himself, his quarry would start to flee like frightened rabbits. He made his way among the rocks with as much caution as a burglar in a bedroom. Thus he reached the boulder, where those who went before had made the turn, and he halted.

But something or other had happened since Curt had departed from that spot, and now the night gave no sign of men hereabouts—for the simple reason that the bootlegging establishment had, like its customers, walked off. For some moments Hurlburt stood harkening, and then the faint murmur of voices came floating down upon him from the upper reaches of the gorge. He heard the scrape of a boot-sole on the rocks.

He knew that some suspicion or alarm had caused the liquor-peddlers to move away, for not even the most persistent customer would travel farther than this point where he was standing. He dropped on his hands and knees and followed the sounds.

About him everything was thick inky black, so dense a gloom that he had trouble in making out the nearest boulders. And now while he came on slowly as a stalking Apache, there began to grow upon him the feeling that some one was dogging him. He realized from dearly bought experience in such matters that the first alarm would scatter those whom he was hunting, and he pressed on, hoping to reach them before the man behind him overtook him. Thus he crept onward for perhaps a hundred yards.

Some one was moving up there in the dark ahead of him. As his eyes fixed themselves on the place where he had seen the vague shape stirring among the surrounding shades, he heard a muttering of voices. There came a flare of light which died, almost at its inception, to a mellow orange glow, and a pair of cupped hands showed, half luminous before the blazing match. Now, as the head bent forward in the act of lighting the cigarette, the face crept out of the night and every feature was revealed. It was the fellow with the close-set eyes.

The match went out. Hurlburt was on his feet. There was not more than ten yards between him and the half-breed. He made the distance in a few long strides, and as he ran, he heard others moving there before him; the forms of men showed indistinctly about the one whom he was seeking. Now that one started to flee, but as he made the first leap, Hurlburt overtook him.

Then, as his fingers were entwining themselves in the coat-collar of the prisoner, and as he was reaching for his revolver, a man seemed to emerge from out of the earth beside them. The deputy felt the dull weight of a terrific blow, and whirling voids of blackness took him unto themselves.

CHAPTER VIII

THE yellow stars that looked down into the steep-walled gulch saw all that happened, but they were the only ones that did. The actors in the tangled drama had to wait a long time before any one of them knew what relation his own part had to the whole plot—or suspected more than half of the plot itself. From the time when Ed Hurlburt entered the gully, complications began.

Curt Wilcox went only a short distance after he met the officer. The policy of "mind your own business" has its limitations, and there were circumstances in this case which made him pause to consider.

A sense of unfair treatment was weighing heavily upon him. It was with him as with one who has expected a hearty clap on the back and has instead received a blow in the solar plexus. In the good old days, when jackrabbit whisky got its reputation, he had wrestled with some sturdy blends, and he was perfectly willing to try conclusions with any honorable concoction of prune-juice, raw alcohol and fusel oil; but in the combination which was rankling beneath his waistband he detected treachery.

"Done sold me *mescal*," he growled, "with giant powder whittled into it." Surely he owed no favors to these bootleggers. Furthermore, he didn't like their looks.

There was something about this pair with whom he had dealt, something which he could not exactly name, but it was disquieting. There is a large difference—though it is hard to describe—between your

felon and your petty criminal; and these fellows impressed him as belonging to the former category.

They were just the sort of men who would rather take a long chance with firearms than go to jail—the breed who would be very apt to turn out to be badly wanted, once they were behind the bars. It was not altogether unlikely that there were more of them close by; he half suspected he had heard some one approaching from farther up the gulch when he had left. And now, no doubt about it, Hurlburt was on his way to raid the establishment.

In his enthusiasm over the pursuit of white mule, Curt had allowed the train-robbers to take a back seat in his mind. But when he stood where he had halted, pondering over the demeanor of the bootleggers, the bandits resumed their proper position in the foreground. What if Hurlburt should try arresting this pair and find himself facing well-armed desperadoes? Arizona had changed much since the days of stage-robbers, but killing officers had not altogether gone out of fashion.

WHEN Curt got this far, he turned to retrace his steps up the gulch, and as he turned, he caught sight of a man outlined in black silhouette against a narrow rift of light which came oozing up from the main portion of the town. There was something vaguely familiar in that form.

"Now, where did he come from?" As Curt asked himself the question, the newcomer entered the gully. Something was due to happen in that narrow gorge very presently.

So now the yellow stars looked down into the ravine and saw—among other things—three men stealing up its arid bed; Hurlburt came first, behind him the one whom Curt had detected, and last of the three came Curt Wilcox, the only one to know of two others beside himself.

Curt had played the grim old game of stalking against Apaches in these same mountains in his youth's limber years. Now, though the limberness had departed and with it the lean long-windedness of those wild old days, he still retained his mastery of the technique. No man could have heard him from ten feet away as he started up the cañon; and one watching from the same brief distance would not have distinguished his form from the rocks over which it was gliding. In his right hand he held his big old-fashioned revolver which he had never abandoned for the more modern weapons of its sort.

"If the's a fight," he reflected, "I might's well try and see that it's a fair one."

The shadows of the cañon absorbed him as they had absorbed the two who went before. Thanks to his previous visit, he had some knowledge of the route; and he marveled, as he approached the large rock which marked the bootleggers' hiding-place, that no sound came to his ears. Surely Hurlburt had by this time reached the rendezvous. But the silence endured, and when he saw the rock looming ahead of him, he realized that the neighborhood was empty save for himself. He dallied for a few seconds, listening, then went on.

He was reasonably certain of the change in the situation which had come since he had left the *mescal*-peddlers. For some reason or other they had withdrawn up the gulch; Hurlburt was still seeking them there ahead, and the prowler who followed could not yet have overtaken the deputy. He crept on over the rocks, halting at intervals to hearken, then feeling his way through the night. He was making one of these pauses, thrusting his head over a boulder, when the half-breed lighted his cigarette.

NOW as the light died down, Curt saw Hurlburt's form rise from the arroyo's bed and rush toward the wanted man. At once he sprang to his feet and followed, closing in on the two of them. As he ran, the unknown who had been dogging the officer dropped back between two rocks. He could have touched Curt as the latter passed him.

The old-timer had seen the half-breed's face in the light of the blazing match, and knowing with whom he had to deal, was cocking his revolver while he ran. He raised the weapon when he saw another form rising apparently from the earth beside the deputy, but the men were too close to each other, and he did not dare to shoot as the blow fell. Then his weapon flamed.

Before the cliffs had ceased bandying the echoes of the shot, a revolver spat a thin stream of fire ahead of him, and he heard a bullet buzz close by. He shot again, but this time no answer came. Footfalls resounded up there among the rocks; but no voice mingled with them; it was as if those who fled were dumb.

"Overshot like a green kid!" Curt cursed

himself artistically and waited for sight of some one at whom to aim. But no form showed in the darkness, and the sound of the feet was growing fainter. Silence came.

"Why can't they take a chance?" he growled, and rose to his full height. A dozen strides brought him to the place where he had seen Hurlburt struck down; he dropped on his knees, and his hand touched the face of his friend, all wet with blood.

Now as he crouched there examining the wound by the light of a match which he had scratched heedless of what results might follow, the man who had dogged Hurlburt raised his head above the rocks where he was hiding and watched him for some moments. Slowly the head withdrew, and there was no sound of this one's stealthy movements as he crept away toward the cañon's mouth.

CHAPTER IX

HURLBURT'S next knowledge of the world consisted of Curt Wilcox's voice bidding him lie still. Then he made out the form of the old-timer bending over him, and remembered what had taken place.

"Quiet," Curt bade him, "and get ready for the shootin' when it starts."

A clip alongside the head is often least troublesome when it looks nastiest; the blood which had not yet fairly begun to congeal on Hurlburt's face made a big showing, but it was the letting of that blood which prevented the concussion from having any serious consequences. Where a small lump which only exploring fingers could detect might have put him out for hours, this cut left him as good as ever, with the exception of a dizziness which was already passing a few minutes after he had fallen under the blow. So now his faculties returned, and he crouched behind the rock with his revolver in his hand waiting for the buzz of the first bullets.

"I had my hands on that half-breed," were the first words he said.

Curt pointed up the gulch. "The hull bunch of 'em are above us there. We got 'em cornered, son. A mountain sheep couldn't climb them cliffs in daylight, let alone when it's dark as this. They'll be trying to break back past us any minute now."

But Curt was reasoning against premises of which he did not know. No sound of any movement came from the upper reaches of the gorge. Slowly the black shadows turned to gray and the gray grew lighter, more impalpable. A shaft of sunlight touched a naked summit.

"I'd like to know what's come of 'em," Curt growled. "This don't look right. You jest wait here. I'm going to sneak back there to that pile of rocks and take a look." He pointed to a mound of boulders which rose to a considerable height behind them and crept away.

HURLBURT kept his eyes on the gorge above them, waiting for a head to show or for a shot to come, and never did know what took place while Curt made his way toward the vantage-point which he had indicated. It seemed to him, however, that his friend had taken a very short time for the trip when he found him at his side again.

"Nothin' doing." Curt's face was wearing a peculiar expression; his narrowed eyes were looking anywhere but at Hurlburt's eyes. He sank down behind the rock but allowed his arm to droop along its summit with a reckless disregard of possible consequences. And when Hurlburt called his attention to this apparent piece of carelessness, he merely shrugged his shoulders. For some time he remained thus, chewing the ends of his mustache and peering off into space. At length:

"The other day," he said lazily, "you-all was tellin' me about a Ford car and two fellers in it. Just where was that?" Hurlburt repeated the story of the shortcut through the mountain and when he had done, Curt delivered his opinion:

"I reckon about this time those *hombres* are havin' breakfast som'eres acrost the line."

"You mean there's a way out of this cañon by the head?" Hurlburt cried.

"Seems like the' must be," Curt answered indifferently.

"Look here," the deputy demanded, "what did you see from those rocks?"

Curt allowed his eyes to come back from the skyline and turned them on his friend.

"Nothing," he said pleasantly, "only more rocks and some ocatilla and the usual amount o' prickly pear. Why?"

"What makes you so blamed sure all of a sudden there's a shortcut?"

"Becuz,"—the old-timer smiled, and there was something in that smile which

did not seem to the other to be altogether frank,—"if those fellers were up there, they'd not wait for the break o' day to come back. If they aint up there, why, they're som'eres else and they cain't climb out. That's why." He rose to his feet. "Come on; we're wastin' good time lyin' around here. Le's get back to town."

"Let's find the way they got out," Hurlburt proposed.

"What's the use?" Curt shoved his revolver back into its holster. "They done got out. Who gives a whoop how they done it? I'm sure I don't. If they figger on usin' the place any more, you-all can bet they've got somebody layin' around to see we don't get to it, and I aint hankerin' to be shot at without I have some chance of shootin' back. No, son. They're over in Mexico right now, and me and you don't get a show at 'em unless they come again." He started down the gorge. "Come on. I'm yo'r friend." There was an odd appeal in his voice when he said the last words. It was this that made Hurlburt rise and follow him.

"I'll phone the office," the latter said as they were nearing the gully's mouth. Curt gave him a queer sidelong look, but made no reply.

"I'll get hold of Dan and one or two of the boys, and we'll comb down this place," he was going on, but the old-timer interrupted him.

"Get yo'r face washed off, and we'll eat a bite o' breakfast," he advised. "These here bootleggers will keep."

"But that half-breed," Hurlburt cried. "I tell you I saw him."

"Well, he wont spile, either." Curt yawned elaborately and stretched his arms. The movement ceased abruptly, and he recovered a black bundle which was slipping forth from beneath his coat. And when he was doing this, shoving back the package into its place of concealment, the indifference vanished from his face. One seeing him would have said that he seemed afraid lest his companion notice what he was carrying. But Hurlburt was intent on his own thoughts and failed to catch the movement or the look.

"I'd like to know," he said as they were entering the outskirts of the town, "what's happened to make you change your way of looking at this, all of a sudden. There's something on your mind."

Curt smiled and clapped him on the shoulder. "Nothing on my mind—only my hair, what's left of it, that is," he drawled. "We'll talk this thing over later." And that was his last word on the subject for some time.

MORNING was well along now, and Old Town's main street was livelier than it had been the night before—as crowded as it had been in the good old days when the silver boom was reaching its climax. Autos were arriving every few minutes from neighboring towns and from valley ranches as far as fifty miles away, laden to the guards with passengers. The crowd was taking on a different complexion than it had borne during the hours while the lamps were blazing. Women were growing numerous; children were everywhere. The Mexican and Yaqui element had retired into the background; the customers of the bootlegging establishment had vanished; this was as respectable an everyday throng as one would find in any Eastern village.

Now and then a pony threaded its winding way among the jam of vehicles, keeping to the running walk. Sunburned young riders from far-flung ranches along the border waved their hands at acquaintances on the dismantled sidewalks; occasionally one of them shouted a hearty "Howdy!" at the two officers.

Hurlburt found a basin and water in the rear of the improvised restaurant and made himself as near to respectable as he was able; but his heart sank a little as he looked over his battered Panama. The hat was a complete ruin, with a ragged tear in the crown. The only telephone in the place was away up the hill at a power-station belonging to the mining-company, and at Curt's advice he postponed sending in the news to the office until after breakfast. It was some time after nine when he finally got Bob O'Donnel on the phone.

"Sheriff's on his way to Old Town now," Bob told him. "He ought to be there inside of fifteen minutes or so."

Doud was even quicker than the deputy had promised. When Hurlburt returned to the main street, he caught sight of his chief's big touring-car ahead of him, and a flutter of feminine garments in the rear made his heart leap. Instinctively he glanced down over his own dirt-stained raiment and sighed. He did not like the idea of making a poor appearance before Charis Hilton when she was in young Lewis' company.

But Lewis was not there, and as he drew nearer he saw that, for the time at least, he had the girl all to himself.

"Uncle Dan's somewhere about, looking for you, I think," she told him. "Never mind hunting him up now. He'll come back presently." Her eyes went over him, critically at first and then, as they fell on the hat, they widened. He had been unable to clean off all the bloodstains.

"You're hurt," she cried. "What happened?"

He climbed into the car and took his place beside her. "Nothing," he told her lightly. "There was a little trouble with some bootleggers last night, and I got my hat spoiled. That's all—excepting," he added with forced indifference, "that they managed to get away."

She shook her head, and for the moment her face was grave. "I'm sure it must have been worse than you're telling me," she answered quietly, and then her eyes lighted. "Anyway, I'm glad you're here. Uncle Dan is always so busy, with men shaking hands with him and calling him off on business, and I want some one to tell me about the riding."

He thought of young Lewis, but as long as she had said nothing about the failure of that cavalier to appear, he wisely concluded to keep silent on the subject. A moment later—

"There's Uncle Dan now," she exclaimed and he saw the Sheriff coming toward them through the crowd. Just then old Curt, who had caught sight of them from the sidewalk, put his foot on the running-board and hat in hand, greeted Charis. Doud came on slowly, nodding to acquaintances, pausing to shake the hands of political supporters and friends. But when his eyes fell on Curt Wilcox, his face tightened; he halted for a moment, and the two old-timers gazed at each other fixedly. There was a rancor in their eyes which astonished Hurlburt, although he had been a witness to that unpleasant incident when Doud had met the posse near this same spot. The Sheriff's look traveled slowly from Curt to the car, and now he saw his deputy for the first time. At once he strode across the interval and the descending lids curtained all expression in his eyes.

"Well?" That was all Doud said.

HURLBURT told him briefly what had happened in the cañon during the latter end of the night, and as the Sheriff listened, he looked as one who slumbers on his feet. When the deputy had finished, Doud's voice was heavy with reproof.

"You ort to of stayed in the office," he said. "The's two men's work waitin' for you over there."

Hurlburt was about to speak, and his cheeks were hot with the anger which humiliation brings, when he caught Curt Wilcox's eye. The old-timer was shaking his head.

"All right!" he said, changing the words from those which had leaped to his tongue's end. "You're the boss, Dan. But those fellows—"

"As long as you *are* here," the Sheriff interrupted evenly, "why, you'd better stay, I reckon. I'm busy on this case, and she'll be wanting some one to show her the sights this afternoon." He nodded to Charis and turned away without a word.

Curt had gone to his little cut-down Ford and was stowing away a package in one of the seat pockets.

Charis Hilton turned to Hurlburt.

"Don't you think that's an atrocious hat that Uncle Dan's bought himself?" she asked by way of diversion. Just what Hurlburt answered he did not know, for he was not in a frame of mind to notice a man's headgear at the time. And yet, if he had only had the gift of second sight, he would have learned as he was sitting there quite disconsolate beside the girl, that there was a great deal of importance attached to the change of which she had spoken.

CHAPTER X

IF Charis Hilton had been a different sort of a girl—more like the ordinary run of young women—this game of cross purposes which had begun on the night of her arrival in Chiracajon might have kept up longer than it did, and come to a different end, for all one knows. For when the average girl begins to find a man very much to her liking, she is apt to forget frankness in her dealings with him—and she is prone to shut her eyes against understanding when he starts making a poor appearance. But Charis owned a directness which was almost boyish, and because she was beginning genuinely to fancy Hurlburt did not seem to her to be a reason for her deliberately fostering a misunderstanding between them.

When she made that remark about

Doud's new hat, it did look as if Hurlburt were going out of his way to make himself poor company. His brief answer and the lack of further effort on his part to stimulate conversation piqued her for a moment. But she had seen enough of him to know—as girls do know such things—that he was anxious to be with her; and instead of allowing her resentment to show, she hid it carefully and tried to see his side of the matter.

He was, in the meantime, feeling hurt, and he was sorely puzzled. Doud's words rankled in his memory. The smart of the humiliation was all the keener because he had been made to suffer it in her presence. It was as it had been the night before, when that man struck him down from behind. He could not see all that was taking place, and only realized that he was being attacked. Something was going on which had set the Sheriff against him.

THERE is nothing which a good officer hates so much as being pulled off a case when he has begun to discover evidence; and this was the second time that Doud had deliberately sidetracked Hurlburt from pursuit of the train-robbers. Not only that, but it was the second time in this same neighborhood, the second time he had been ordered off when he was heading toward that shortcut across the mountains into Mexico.

There was something remarkable about that, when he came to think of it. Undoubtedly Doud had sent him on a wild-goose chase on the previous occasion, knowing it was to be a fruitless quest. Undoubtedly the Sheriff was astounded on seeing him here today—and angry at seeing Curt. What was there to make this neighborhood so strangely sacred, anyhow? Hurlburt asked himself the question, and if it had not been that he owned a deep-rooted faith in his chief, he would have allowed suspicion to take hold of him and lead him into ugly speculations. But Doud was honest; that was, with him, an established fact, and not to be denied by anyone.

He recalled Curt's behavior up there in the narrow gulch, and the mystery thickened. What had made the old-timer so sure, all of a sudden, that the fugitives had slipped away? When he came to think back on it, he very much doubted that his companion had ever reached the summit of the boulder knoll and looked the land over. Curt had found something which had dampened his enthusiasm for the chase and made him anxious to get Hurlburt away from the spot. Why that anxiety? What was the old fellow trying to keep from his knowledge?

These thoughts kept Hurlburt distraught, and his anger at the injustice which he had suffered added to the distraction. He had been made to appear very poorly in her eyes, and because he would have appeared at his best, he felt vaguely resentful toward her.

She was, as he had told himself on that first evening when he had seen her, a sensible girl. And being sensible, she realized in spite of the natural pique which his silence caused her to feel, that he was unhappy. She had seen and heard enough to know that he had done a bold deed during the night and had been reprimanded for it, and the feminine in her told her that a good part of his humiliation existed because the reprimand had been delivered in her presence. Wherefor she made up her mind to be nice to him. And Charis understood how to be very nice to a young man.

So, gradually and without apparent effort on her part, she began to awaken him to answering her questions; and when she had gotten this far, she straightway began to show more interest in wanting to know about Old Town, the people and the roping contest. Before he really realized it, he was talking on his own account, and as he volunteered such information as he thought would appeal to her, he found himself looking into her face, which was far more pleasant than gazing into space. By the time the roping contest was scheduled to begin, he was telling her of the deserted town. In its day the camp had lived through a strenuous period, a period during which the lamps in the long dance-hall never went out all night long, when guns flashed in the streets, and men died fighting, when the statutes of the territory of Arizona were unacknowledged, and the law of the forty-five ruled the turbulent spirits of the citizens. Such tales she had read in fiction, but these came from his lips with a tang of reality and now she was genuinely aroused.

"That," she cried when he had finished one of them, "is the West."

"It was the West," he told her smilingly, "but it's all done and over now."

She was silent for a moment, and then: "I'd like to see the old buildings," she said, "where those things happened."

"Most of 'em are half ruined," he answered, "and hidden out in the mesquite. I could show 'em to you, though. It's easy to drive over." And then as the thought occurred to him, "Or you could ride, for that matter. I'd be mighty glad to saddle up and go along with you—as soon as I can steal the time."

The cars about them were beginning to start toward the open space at the town's lower edge where the roping-contest was to come off. He had the self-starter going, and they joined the procession as she was thanking him.

"And really," she added, "I've been looking forward to your taking a ride with me. Mr. Lewis has been the only one who's come, so far; and he isn't very much good in the saddle."

AND it was just at this juncture, when everything was going so nicely, that young Lewis hailed them from another car. Hurlburt's face fell as Doud's junior partner waved his hand, and the girl saw it. He had been hoping that there might be no Lewis today—that much might have been spared him. There was not much more to be said between them during the next few minutes, for driving in this jam of vehicles kept his hands and mind busy, and when he had the car parked in an advantageous place whence they could see everything that came off on the field without being obliged to leave their seats, Lewis climbed on the running-board.

"Hello, Ed," he cried when he had greeted Charis Hilton. "You here? I heard you'd got laid up. They tell me you done got the worst of it last night, and then on top of that the old man gives you the deuce for butting in on his case. Better leave such things to the old-timers, if you go to asking me."

He was in the car now, and comfortably disposing himself on the rear seat; and as Hurlburt made no answer nor offered any opposition to his so doing, he proceeded forthwith to appropriate the conversation to himself. He leaned forward, placing his arms on the front seat, with his head thrust between those of it's two occupants, and his nose-glasses fairly radiated the light of his self-esteem as he offered his comments on the spectacle which was taking place before their eyes.

The contest was being conducted in the good old-fashioned way—rope and throw and tie, all timed by the judges' watches. Before the black pack of men and vehicles, the lithe young riders came forth, one after the other, upon the bare open plain. Each halted pony stood with its ears moving back and forth but otherwise as immobile as a statue. Each rider sat deep in his stock-saddle, like a carven figure, holding the loose reins in his left hand. Thus for some tense moments, until the released steer dashed away seeking the freedom of the open reaches beyond. Then, when the signal was given, pony and rider were off after the fugitive; the rope flashed in the sunlight, soared and descended to its mark. The steer somersaulted in the middle of a dust cloud; and now while the wise pony stood where he had come to an abrupt stop, hauling back upon the rope that stretched from the saddle-horn to the captured beef, the rider was off and wrestling with the prisoner. In the middle of the dust-cloud the judges caught his upraised hand and called the time. So it went, with varying incident, and the lean young punchers from the valley ranges risked their bronzed necks in such riding as one can see only in a few places nowadays.

And while the poetry of horsemanship was being written there before their eyes upon the dusty flat, the occupants of the front seat of Dan Doud's car listened perforce to a running comment of those ready-made phrases which have come down from the old days and degenerated into moving-picture captions or catch-lines on State fair posters.

"Ride him, cowboy!" young Lewis shouted for the tenth time that afternoon, and never knew that this was the straw which broke the camel's back. For Charis Hilton gave no sign that she had even heard him; nor did she allow her eyes to turn toward him, but remained looking straight ahead of her. And it was a half-hour later, when a San Simon boy and a youngster from the lower reaches of the Sulphur Springs Valley had just finished contending for honors on two vicious little outlaws from the Horse Ranch, when she spoke to him.

"There's a dance tonight," the enthused Lewis told her, "and I'd sure be pleased if you'd stay over with me."

"Mr. Hurlburt," she said quietly, "is going to drive me home." And because she could not help it—perhaps she would not have helped it if she could—there was enough of coldness in her tone to penetrate his thick exterior. They missed him

shortly afterward, and Hurlburt drove her to Chiracajon with the setting of the sun. And neither of them guessed that this little incident had done its part to help in bringing matters to a head.

CHAPTER XI

THE evening after the roping-contest Hurlburt met Dan Doud in the doorway of Chiracajon's corner drug-store. He had not seen the Sheriff since their encounter in Old Town's street, and he had made up his mind to have it out with his chief at the first opportunity. Here, then, was that chance. They stood there for a moment looking into each other's eyes, and as had happened so often lately, Doud's lids dropped before the younger man's steady gaze. He was, however, the first to speak.

"Come on in, Ed," he said blandly, "and have a sody." As if there were not the slightest doubt of the invitation's being accepted, he turned; and Hurlburt was too good a politician not to follow him, with the eyes of the other customers on them. No use to breed a scandal in the party by a public demand for the explanation which he felt that he could force in decent privacy later on.

Conversation languished across the little marble-topped table until the glasses were brought on, and then Doud made a virtue of necessity, abandoning his habit of taciturnity in order to bridge over what otherwise would have been awkward gaps. He spoke of range conditions in the valleys, of the timeliness of the summer rains, of the latest border news, which was sultry as all border news had been for some years now, and of everything excepting the matter which Hurlburt knew was on his mind. Not a word did he utter concerning the train-robbers. The two of them had sipped up the sweet innocuous drinks until the rattling of the Sheriff's straw proclaimed that his glass was dry; then:

"Ride up to the house with me," he suggested quietly. "I want to talk with you."

"Some car!" Hurlburt exclaimed as Doud flung open the door of a brand-new green roadster.

"Ort to be," the older man observed grimly, "I done paid five thousand for her. She just come in today." He started the motor and slipped in the clutch. The auto glided smoothly from low into intermediate and from second into high. "Hardware business is rushin' lately, and I figgered the store could stand for this boat without anybody's feelin's being hurt." There was a peculiar change in his voice now; it had taken on a semi-defiant ring, and his face was tight. Dan Doud looked as he might have looked in the good old days when he had attained a reputation as a gun-fighter. "Picks up nice, don't she?" he went on more cheerfully, and cast a sidelong glance at his seatmate. But Hurlburt had fallen silent again. If there was to be an explanation, now was the time for it.

"Ye-es," Doud drawled with a patent assumption of indifference, "I've got a heap of runnin' round to do on this blamed train-robber case."

Hurlburt continued looking straight ahead.

"Speakin' of train-robbers," the Sheriff continued, "makes me think: me and you had some words over to Old Town yesterday."

"Hold on, there," Hurlburt interrupted briskly.

"Well, then, 'twas me that done the talkin', I'll own up," Doud acknowledged, and took one hand from the steering-wheel while he mopped the perspiration from his forehead with his colored silk handkerchief. "Hot as the devil tonight—and sticky, too. Mebbe I did go too strong, the way I put it up to you, with others around."

He glanced at the younger man, and there was something like appeal in his look. The lines in his face had deepened lately; he seemed to have grown a good ten years older in the last week. Hurlburt noted the change, and he would have liked to answer that appeal, but he knew nothing to say. Besides, he wanted an explanation. They traveled two blocks in silence.

"Ed," Doud said abruptly, "here's the idee: I cain't handle the civil business—not jest now. You've got to. Them things need 'tending to and, you're gettin' broke in for the time when you'll be sheriff, by doin' that work. I aim to quit some of these days. Fact is, I'm half figgerin' on droppin' out purty soon. And you're the man for the job if I've got anything to say about it—that is, pervided you stick her out and learn the tricks."

"Dan"—Hurlburt turned in the seat and faced him—"that's no way to square this up with me."

The Sheriff shook his head deprecatingly. "What I'm gettin' at—you made me hot yesterday when I found you traipsing off at the other end of the county with ol' Curt Wilcox—and all the jury-work waitin' to be 'tended to. I plumb lost my temper. Besides—"

Doud's voice sank, and his eyelids fluttered down. "Well," he went on, "I'll tell you the facts: you done balled me up. There is some funny twists to this train-robber case. It needs careful handling. And anybody can spile it and do a hull lot of harm by making a bad move jest now. I want to be let plumb alone until I holler for your help." There was something almost furtive in his manner, and Hurlburt felt uneasy as he watched his face.

"Why in the devil didn't you tell me this before?" he demanded. "I'd have stayed away if I had known. There's too much mystery stuff in this whole business to suit me, anyhow. That morning when you sent us off to Wild Rose Cañon—and you must have known that a burro couldn't cross the range there!"

DOUD'S features were set, and it looked as if he were driving with his eyes shut.

"I'll tell you when the time comes," he said at length, and his voice was weary; he had never appeared so old as he did then. "And until I call for you, I want you should keep your hands off—and keep Curt Wilcox away from me."

"I'll not bother you," Hurlburt said stiffly, "but I reckon Curt will go where he pleases. I don't ride herd on him."

Doud's hand came away from the steering-wheel and fell on the under-sheriff's arm. "Do you have to go to distrusting me?" he asked quietly. And that question did what all his lame explanations had failed to do. Hurlburt flushed with something like shame as he answered:

"I'm trusting you, Dan. And I'm sticking to the office till you want me outside." For he had known Doud and liked him too long to give up their friendship for any mystery. He deliberately put all of those doubts—which the Sheriff's demeanor tonight had raised in his mind—away. He reproached himself for having ever allowed them to enter his head. A man must be entirely loyal to those whom he likes, else he can no longer like them; and he wanted to like Dan Doud as he had been doing for all these years.

So he would have continued liking him, too, and suspicion would not have come again to trouble him, had it not been for a little thing which was to happen the next day and turn the tenor of his feelings.

But in the meantime he felt better, as a man always does when he can look trustfully into the eyes of an old friend; and life began to seem different than it had a little while ago. The worries which had bothered him were sliding off from his back; the trouble over at Old Town became forgotten; the train-robbers all but vanished from his mind.

The Sheriff shut off the power, and the roadster came to a stop before his gate.

"Come on inside. You aint been halfways sociable lately." His voice was hearty, and Hurlburt saw Charis Hilton sitting on the wide veranda.

"Did Uncle tell you about his horse?" she cried as they reached the steps.

"Been talking business," Doud explained indulgently, "and I plumb forgot it." He turned, smiling, to Hurlburt. "I had one of the boys fetch over my big roan from the ranch. She says you done promised to go ridin' with her. I told her that Lewis aint safe comp'ny for a girl on a skittish pony—keeps him busy to stick in his own saddle."

Hurlburt seated himself in one of the wide rockers on the veranda. A thread of running water glistened in the moonlight among the grass-blades. Green vines curtained the porch, allowing thin rifts of moonbeams to creep through their foliage and settle in white pools upon the floor. An *olla*, brought down by Doud from Cochise's stronghold as a trophy of a scouting expedition against the Apaches many years ago, swung slowly to and fro on its hangings, and to its movements the gourd which was suspended beside it tapped a faint musical accompaniment. There was something very restful within this tiny oasis, and Hurlburt remembered, as he sat there, how the office work had its regularity of hours with Saturday afternoon free, how the criminal business never left a man owning leisure at any time. After all, he had the chance to come here from now on, and could make an engagement to go horseback-riding with the knowledge that he would be able to keep it.

DOUD lounged against one of the porch pillars, and as the young fellow listened to Charis Hilton's voice, he became

less and less conscious of the older man's presence, until the lank form made no more impression on him than if it had been a part of the post into which it merged in the shadows. Eventually the Sheriff withdrew into the house. Hurlburt and the girl sat there talking of the roan horse, of the bay pony, of the roping-contest; and then—because the mention of the place of the day before had kindled her imagination—Hurlburt spoke of Old Town. He told her of the time when Curly Bill and his fellow-outlaws went to church and how the congregation fled, of the truculent justice of the peace who used to enforce his edicts with a sawed-off shotgun, of the big gunfight where two factions killed each other off in the main street.

And because Dan Doud was sitting within a darkened room, where his endless chain of cigarettes kept a constant pinpoint of glowing red to mark his presence, wrestling with a problem which brought deep lines of mingled dread and anger and shame into his face, he heard their voices only as a vague murmuring, a murmuring which sometimes wrung his heart with a wistful envy of their untroubled youth, a murmuring which, however, conveyed to him no single word. He did not hear the old town's name. And he did not hear Charis telling his deputy how happy it would make her to ride over to the place on the afternoon of the morrow. Had he heard, he would not have remained there, silent, in that inner room.

"Tomorrow afternoon, then!" Hurlburt rose. "And I'll make it just as early as I can." His hat was in his hand, and as he bade her good night, he looked down into her eyes. They were looking up into his. She did not answer his good night at once, but the two of them stood thus mute, as young people sometimes do, and read, each with a sudden rush of joy, the meaning of the light which each saw in the other's gaze. Then he went away and as he went, stepped forth as one who walks on air, because on the morrow they were to be together.

CHAPTER XII

ACCORDING to the delightful custom of those who make their living in the courts of law, all legal wheels in the county of Chiracajon stopped turning promptly at twelve o'clock on Saturday. And in accordance with this same custom the morning was but a preparation for the half-holiday. No one did any more than he had to. So the civil business in the Sheriff's office ended at the stroke of twelve, and until that time a man only needed to straighten up odds and ends and keep his eye on the clock.

Hurlburt came to the courthouse lighthearted. He was thinking of the roan horse, the bay pony—and Charis Hilton. Life looked decidedly worth while, as life ought to look when a man is still in his twenties.

Now Chiracajon, being the county seat, was metropolitan enough to support a daily paper which was issued six mornings a week. And when Hurlburt had taken his place at his desk, Bob O'Donnel, the cheery deputy who had been delegated to attend to minor criminal work of late, came into the room and placed a copy of the sheet before him.

"Look at!" Bob bade him.

Hurlburt saw the item to which his big finger was pointing. It was surmounted by a single black headline:

"SHAKE-UP IN SHERIFF'S OFFICE.

"Owing," the article went on to say, "to recent events, Sheriff Dan Doud has made some changes in the work of his deputies. Hereafter Ed Hurlburt, the under-sheriff, will remain in the office and look after civil business, and Doud himself will supervise important criminal cases. It was stated on the best authority that the shift has been made because of dissatisfaction with Under-sheriff Hurlburt's conduct in the pursuit of the Bagdad Siding train-robbers. According to those who know, Hurlburt as good as had his hands on the band on two occasions, but let them slip through his fingers. On the last occasion he made the mistake of not taking the Sheriff into his confidence, and went out with Customs Inspector Curt Wilcox, and the two of them got the worst of it in a brush with the bandits near Old Town. Hereafter Dan will do the bandit-hunting for Chiracajon County."

"Pretty raw," Bob O'Donnel said.

Hurlburt made no answer. For Chiracahua's daily paper was Sheriff Doud's personal organ; and it was, to him, a well-known fact that no item concerning the office ever appeared without at least Doud's sanction. It looked as if he were being made a sacrifice to some one. He recalled the vague talk of the night before concern-

ing the delicacy of the case, and the Sheriff's demeanor. Why couldn't Dan be frank with him?

Bob O'Donnel had left the room. Hurlburt bent over his work, but he did it only mechanically. Suspicion had crept into his mind again; he was fighting against it, but it persisted, just as a thin trickle of water persists in crawling through a crack in a dam. And as is the case with a dam, so it was with his mind. When the time came—as it was soon to come now—all barriers would give way before the flood that was to follow.

BY noon Hurlburt had managed to forget the matter—at least to relegate it to a back seat in his thoughts. Doud had not shown up during the morning, and he was willing to wait until he saw the Sheriff, hoping for the chance of an explanation after all. And he wanted to get away as soon as possible for that ride over to Old Town. When he was leaving the courthouse, he was so cheerful that others who had read the item marveled at his unconcern.

He hurried to his lunch, and from his lunch to his room, where he lost no time in changing his usual neat raiment for the rougher saddle garb which he kept in store for those rare emergencies that took him away from the automobile roads. If he had only known it, he made a finer appearance in the soft-crowned, wide-rimmed hat, the loose flannel shirt and the leather chaps than he did in his polite clothes. When he came riding up the hill on the big blue roan, he saw the bay pony tethered by the Sheriff's gate and the girl standing beside it. And now he realized, from the joy which her eagerness brought to him, how eager he had been.

Lewis was on the curb before Doud's hardware store when the two of them rode down the main street. He waved his hand at them, and there was something lackadaisical in the gesture, as if his heart were not in it. His glasses seemed to beam on them, but when he turned away to talk to one of the clerks who had come outside to ask about some small matter, he was coldly severe.

IT was one of those marvelous Arizona summer afternoons which come with the rains, when the presence of storms in the mountains has a mellowing effect on the air, when the little flowers and green shoots are springing up beside the road and the dust-smell has vanished from the arid flats.

They saw a storm sweeping over the Dragoons as they rode forth from the town, and another masking the Whetstones with a dark pall. The smell of thunder was in the air, though the sun shone bright here. They put their horses to the running walk; Old Town lay all of twenty miles away, and they had planned to make the return trip in the evening—seven hours of travel, with an hour or so to look over the ruins in the mesquite.

"If it's too much for you," he told her as they were descending the hill to the wide flat-lands, "just say so any time and we can stop."

She laughed. "Indeed, I'm able to stand a lot longer ride," she assured him.

He noticed that she had mastered the stock saddle and its longer stirrups, and was sitting her horse with the litheness of a cowboy; and that made him admire her the more. He was about to ask her where she had learned to ride, when she spoke again.

"Uncle and I had something like a quarrel this morning," she said, "and I've a confession to make. He forbade me going to Old Town—that is, he said he didn't want me to go. And I insisted. Well, in the end I let him think that I saw his arguments—he said I couldn't stand the ride, and it was foolish to travel so far on a hot afternoon and all that sort of thing. I couldn't see any use of disputing any longer with him, and I guess he thinks I'm converted to his way of thinking. Not that it's anything to worry over. I'm my own mistress as far as that goes, you know."

Hurlburt nodded and made no audible answer; what she had said had set him to thinking of Doud's queer ways again. What ailed the Sheriff anyhow?

IT was midafternoon when they reached the other side of the mesquite plain. He pointed to the dark thickets at the foot of the mountains ahead of them.

"See those cottonwoods," he cried, "just under the bare patch of cliff? Their tops show over the mesquite. Well, that's where the main portion of the camp was in the eighties. Up where we were in the gulch was all built later—after the wild days."

"Come on," she called, and spurred her pony. "Let's hurry now. Then we'll have the more time to look around."

He heard her laugh of pure joy, and he gave the roan rein to follow. They galloped up the easy grade to the bench-lands and stopped at the top of the hill to look back. Far across the valley they saw gray sheets of rain mantling the mesa on which Chiracajon stood. Another storm was gathering in the range in front of them. He shook his head.

"I'm afraid you're in for a drenching," he told her.

"What of it?" She shook her head, mocking him. "We can find shelter easily enough. Don't be a spoil-sport like Uncle."

They rode on through clumps of bear-grass which reached the horses' bellies, and he bade her turn to the right. They struck off into the mesquite, and five minutes later they were as completely hidden from the surrounding world as if they were traveling in the depths of a great forest. The horses' hoofs drummed gently on the soft earth; save this and the murmur of their voices, there was no sound about them. The thick masses of serrated green leaves cast deep shadows over them. They made their way onward by a twisting cattle-path, but once as he was rounding a turn, Hurlburt caught the fresh imprint of a man's foot in the soft earth. And once he noticed a multitude of burros' tracks in a trail which they were crossing. These things made him a little uneasy, for of the few inhabitants left up in the gulch, none had occasion to come down here. Perhaps Doud had good reason for not wanting the girl to visit the place, after all.

HE heard her exclaim a moment later, and there was something in her tone which made him lean forward in the saddle. But she was looking at a tottering fragment of adobe wall.

"It was like seeing a ghost," she told him.

The gnarled mesquite rose far above their heads; they dismounted and led their ponies down what had been in its day a roaring street, a street where guns had often flashed, where men had died battling boldly on more than one occasion. Here and there a roofless wall with high arched windows proclaimed the remnants of a building more pretentious than its neighbors.

"This," he was telling her as they halted before a ruin which still retained portions of its second story, "was the Oriental. They say it was the toughest gambling-hall in the Territory, back in the eighties. And here"—he pointed to a number of pits in the plaster outer-covering which clung to portions of the sunbaked bricks, protecting them from inroads of the weather—"are the marks of the bullets in that big gun-fight."

Just then dusk descended upon them as abruptly as if the sun were a candle and a giant hand was snuffing it. The rain began falling in big drops. "Going to come down hard," he prophesied, "and mighty soon too. We'll have to find shelter in there till it's over. Let me take the mare." He led the horses behind a clump of mesquite and tied them. When he rejoined the girl, the rain was beating a dull long roll along the mesa! "Come!" He took her arm and helped her over a pile of fallen adobe bricks.

They crossed a roofless space which had been devoted to dance-hall and gambling. A rift in the wall beyond gave entrance to a rear room, and this was still sheltered by the sagging upper floor. By the time they reached it, the noise of the flood which was pouring down upon that covering was terrific.

"Just in time!" she placed her lips close to his ear and he felt as one who is intoxicated when her warm breath caressed his cheek. The feeling passed suddenly. He laid his hand on her arm.

"Hark!" he bade her.

For a moment as he stood there listening, he thought that he might have fancied it; and then it came again, the sound of voices close by. It seemed to him that the words were in Spanish. Then the rain slackened away, and in the abrupt lull he heard what made his blood stop running. The fear which a man feels for one who is dear to him possessed him now, and he realized that Doud had indeed good reason for warning Charis Hilton to keep away from Old Town.

CHAPTER XIII

IN its day the Oriental had been called by its proprietors "a palace of amusement;" and its thick adobe walls then housed a gambling place and dance-hall at the corner of Old Town's two main streets. Now the empty arches of its doorways and windows gaped at thickets where those streets had been. Hurlburt and

Charis had entered the front of the ruins, crossing the length of the largest room to find their refuge in a rear apartment. Behind this there were other rooms, and the voices came from the next one of these. A space where once a door had hung opened into it; and here a portion of the wall had fallen, leaving the floor heaped high with sunbaked bricks all about the aperture. Hurlburt and the girl stood close to the partition on the lower edge of the pile; the doorway was less than a yard away from him. From the sound it was clear that the man who was talking must be directly opposite.

"Quiet, you two," were the first words Hurlburt caught in Spanish, and there was a pause. Then: "I thought I heard some one." There followed an interval during which those on one side of the wall crouched motionless as hiding game that sees the hunter pass its covert, and those on the other side were listening. The rain came on, harder than before, drumming on the floor-boards overhead.

"Nothing!" The voice was deeper than the first, and the accent was unmistakably American. "You're always hearing some one or seeing things."

"My friend," the first voice was answering, "if you had kept your word with me, I would not need to listen now so carefully. But you are not satisfied with business when the officers are willing to look the other way; you must bring them here, hot after us all. Why don't you wait to do your robbing down in Mexico? There is still loot in Sonora for such as you."

Hurlburt was thoroughly familiar with Spanish as it is spoken south of the line, and he knew that he was listening to a Mexican of the better class. There flashed into his mind a picture of those two men whom he had seen on that first afternoon arguing so bitterly in the battered Ford.

A third voice broke in, cursing the storm in English.

"What are you two always a-rowing for that-a-way?" the man asked querulously. "We got the Sheriff's office sewed up tighter'n a drum. And tonight we're acrost the line for good, aint we? I swear I'd rather be a-laying outside of Agua Prieta in a ditch again, and not a drop of water in my canteen or a bite to eat for three days, than listen to you arguin' like two ol' women, the way you do. If he thinks there's somebody in there, why don't you let him go and see?"

"Leave him go, then, for all I care," the second voice finished with an oath.

THEN Hurlburt took a long chance and edged closer to the door; his right hand slipped back beneath his coat; its sweating fingers gripped the butt of the flat automatic which he always carried, but—as he had laughingly told Charis on that first night—managed to keep concealed. He knew his men now.

Beyond the boundary those two Americans probably wore the shoulder-straps of colonels. The guerrilla forces which were devastating northern Chihuahua and Sonora still retained a goodly sprinkling of rough adventurers, some of them honest and some thieves, men who had floated down upon the current which was drawing all wild spirits to the border in these days. The other was undoubtedly some native officer who had been sent over with them because in such parties there must always be at least one Mexican to look out for the interests of his chief.

And he knew their mission as well as if they had spoken of it more openly. These were the times when gun-running and ammunition-smuggling were making many reputable Americans rich, all the way from Yuma to El Paso, the days when people in general winked at this form of law-breaking, when high-powered automobiles were traveling rough byroads through the mesquite, dodging Federal officials every night in the year. What had hit him like a blow between the eyes were the words of the Mexican:

"When the officers are willing to look the other way."

Was that the key to the mystery which had lain back of Sheriff Dan Doud's behavior ever since the train-robbery? He saw, in his mind's eye, the Sheriff sitting in that new expensive roadster, bought from the profits of the hardware store, and his heart grew sick. Was he being used to help protect train-robbers whose operations at gun-running helped to make the hardware business boom? He thanked the good fate that kept the girl, who stood beside him here, from understanding Spanish. Things were bad enough without her learning her uncle's venality.

But when he glanced around at her and saw her face, white and set, he realized with a cold feeling in his heart that one had spoken in English words which were more damning than the Mexican's.

"We got the Sheriff's office sewed up tighter'n a drum.'

She knew then and somehow the knowledge of her knowledge seemed at once to put a gulf between them. It was as if Doud's guilt had been a fault of Hurlburt's.

All of these things went flashing through his mind, with the swiftness which thought can take in times like this. And before the next speech came to his ears from behind the wall, he did not much care what might have happened—had he only been alone.

"I go," the Mexican said, and Hurlburt drew his pistol from under his coat; his thumb slipped down the safety catch.

A second passed and another; and then, as he was stiffening with eagerness to raise the weapon, there came a blinding flash. The thunder-clap followed almost at once. It seemed as if the walls of the building must fall apart under the concussion.

SILENCE followed. And during the brief interval when the elements seemed to be resting before their next assault, the voice of the Mexican came from beyond the wall; the man was calling on his saints. One of the others swore.

"Struck the corner of the building," he cried.

"Why don't you go ahead and look?" the man who had quarreled with him asked the Mexican. "Here! If you're a-scared, I'll go myself."

He must have started when a mass of the adobe crumbled from the summit of the wall and fell upon his side. Hurlburt heard the three of them cry out, and then another sound came from the pile of bricks on which he was standing, a harsh, dry buzzing. As he was drawing back, a score of echoes seemed to answer it. The place was alive with rattlesnakes. Now, as their sibilant warnings were sounding all about him, a blotched and tawny form twined slowly through the doorway into the other room; he saw the upraised head, weaving from side to side, the fiery playing of the forked tongue; then the snake vanished in the shadows beyond.

"Come on!" The voice was receding toward the outer wall of the building. "I tell you them 'dobes is full of 'em." Footfalls sounded, and a kicked shard rattled on the floor. The rain came on once more. Through its noise Hurlburt listened to the retreating voices and the crackling of the mesquite in what had been the side street. He turned his head.

Charis Hilton stood, as she had been standing ever since the time when she entered the place, but her face was dead white; her widened eyes were fixed on him in mute appeal. The buzzing of the snakes had died away; now as he took the first step toward her, it arose again. He set his teeth and held his eyes on her; and then he had her in his arms. At least they should not reach her. As he lifted her up and bore her away across the room into the roofless dance-hall, it seemed to him as if the niches between the broken adobes must be sheltering half the reptiles in the country. Yet none struck, and a moment later he put her down. She leaned against him, and slowly, as if by an effort, opened her eyes; her lips went tight.

"I'm all right now," she whispered.

The rain was slackening off as they left the building, and by the time Hurlburt had untied the horses, the shower had passed the mesa. No sound of voices or of footfalls reached them; they saw no sign of any moving form. When they rode away through the mesquite, it seemed as if they were leaving the abode of ghosts.

The sun came out when they were striking off across the flat toward the highway, and the air was as fresh as the air on an eastern spring morning. They could see the storm as it passed on toward Chiracajon ahead of them, leaving a great shadow on the brush-clad plain. Neither of them talked for a long time; and then:

"Just after those bricks fell," Charis said in a dull voice, "I saw one of those men through the door. It was the man I saw the night the train was robbed."

At the Sheriff's gate she looked up into his face.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Find Dan and go back after them," he told her quietly.

She thanked him with her eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

THERE had been plenty of time for thinking things over during that ride back from Old Town. And this was the only thing to do—"Find Dan and then go after them." That was the reason he had gone to Chiracajon instead of seeking help nearer at hand.

For faith abides with the young very

stubbornly, as if perhaps faith hates the idea of deserting those whose eyes have not yet been opened to the hard facts of this world. And reason, which often makes life unpleasant for all of us, is usually content to wait until a man has suffered a few ugly knocks before it begins disillusioning him. So, in the face of the words which he had heard, he had shut his teeth tightly and made up his mind that Dan Doud might be innocent of any guilty knowledge. And now, when he thought back on some of the strange things which had taken place that first night, Doud's sending the posse off on a wild-goose chase, and his remarkable conduct on the day of the roping contest, even then he shut his teeth still tighter and told himself that Doud was his friend. And that settled it.

THE first thing that Hurlburt did after putting up the horses was to try and to get in touch with the Sheriff. But half an hour of fruitless effort, in which he enlisted the aid of the entire local telephone force, left with him the bare information that Doud was out of town this afternoon. No one knew where he had gone, and he had left no word as to when he was coming back. Bob O'Donnel had accompanied him, and so Hurlburt was left without any aid from the office. He drew a deep breath as he turned away from the telephone and walked out of the drug-store. He stood on the edge of the sidewalk, thinking hard. He could not bring himself to summon outside help; a posse might uproot a scandal over there in Old Town. He scowled as he realized that he was acknowledging a possibility of Doud's guilt in coming to that decision. And as he stood there frowning, some one clapped him on the back. He turned and faced Curt Wilcox.

"Have a good time on your ride?" the old-timer asked quietly.

"Where did you come from?" Hurlburt growled.

"Done followed you two in with my car," Curt answered pleasantly. His eyes narrowed as they met the deputy's. "What's wrong?"

Hurlburt shook his head. "Nothing."

"All right; then come on with me and have a bite to eat. I want to take you out tonight." Curt's manner was jubilant, and just at this moment Hurlburt would have given a good deal to get rid of him. He was starting to make some excuse, when the other broke in on him.

"I have got," he said slowly, "something I want to tell you. And I know who's in Old Town." He took hold of Hurlburt's arm. "No harm in eatin' supper with me, is the'?"

"All right!" Hurlburt shrugged his shoulders and made no further resistance. When they had finished their meal, Curt led the way to the Main Street Garage.

"Been loadin' up with gas an' oil," he said. "Jump in, and I'll tell you what's on my chest when we get outa town." As usual, he got down the length of the main street without fatalities, and when the lights were shining along the Lordsburg Road, he stopped the car.

"Now," he said, "I'll talk; and you can do what you please. I done watched four men come down out of the gulch into Old Town this afternoon. And right after that thunderstorm, I see you two ride out of the mesquite, a-crowdin' your hosses, so's I couldn't help but know you was blamed anxious to get away. I reckon you done run against them *hombres?*"

"I've been looking for Doud ever since I got back," Hurlburt told him. "I promised I'd not butt into the case again. He wants to handle it alone."

Curt remained silent for some time. Then he bent down and drew a package from the seat-pocket; he unwrapped the paper around it and spread out a wide-rimmed black soft hat under the dash light.

"See the 'nitials?" he asked. There was no need for the question. Hurlburt had recognized Doud's old hat.

"I found it in the gulch that mornin' after you got knocked out, and now the bunch is back in Old Town. It aint your funeral, of co'se, but—"

"Shove on," Hurlburt bade him. "I'll go."

CHAPTER XV

CURT drove on, holding the steering wheel—as he had held the reins in the old days—in one hand, while he leaned toward Hurlburt and talked into his ear. And if the young fellow had cherished any faint remnants of hope for Dan Doud's innocence after seeing the crumpled hat, the last of those remnants oozed away.

"Tire-tracks," the old-timer said with a complacency which Hurlburt found hateful, "give me my start on this. I been

putting in considerable time along these roads since I saw you last. Now, Doud and Lewis' hardware store sells Good-enough Cords—and uses them on their two cars. You know that checkered tread. Well then—wait till we get to Hackberry Crick, and I'll show you."

There was little talk between them until they reached the bottom of the wash. Curt pointed down the wagon-track which led off following the stream-bed to the south.

"Their tracks," he proclaimed exultantly. "Made a dozen round-trips by this shortcut. And it's a cinch they're aiming to make another one tonight, or why would those fellows be in Old Town?" Curt turned off into the byroad. "We'll take their trail; it's the shortest way."

IT was one of those rough roads which only a driver who has become accustomed to cattle-country going would dare to try by night. Had they cared to talk now, there would have been scant opportunity, for they needed all their faculties for other things. But while he clung to the tilting seat, Hurlburt went over and over the events of that first evening; and the more he thought, the blacker it all looked—Doud's hurried departure from Chiracajon, the agitation in his voice when he had called Hurlburt over the phone, his sending the posse off the track of the train-robbers. It all tied in too neatly with the presence of that hat which Curt had found in the gulch. At last, when they had climbed out of the creek-bed and were coming near Old Town, Curt spoke again.

"I don't care a whoop about this gun-running. Lots of good men's mixed up in that business nowadays. But he tried to make a monkey out of me."

Of a sudden it struck Hurlburt that this also was his deepest grievance against Doud.

"Got to leave the car here," the old-timer said presently. "They'd hear us if we drove any nearer." He picked a suitable place and whipped off into the mesquite.

"Now?" Hurlburt demanded when they had stopped out of sight of the road. Curt dragged his carbine from its sheath and hauled another from the bottom of the car.

"Here's my idee," he exclaimed. "Get up there to the mesa and lay for them *hombres*. They'll be a-comin' down with burros to take on their load of ca'tridges. I figger on catchin' 'em before Doud's car gets here. That way we get the half-breed, and nobody will know about the gun-runnin'. Sheriff's office is given the credit, because you're makin' the arrest. And Dan learns his lesson. He'll know better next time, I reckon."

HURLBURT drew a long deep breath. It was as if a weight had been lifted from his chest. There would be no scandal, but just the same he was going through life with the knowledge of Doud's treachery. There was no joy within him as he took the rifle from his friend's hands. Curt swore light-heartedly.

"I'll show Dan Doud that he cain't make a monkey outa me," he said. "Come on." They were climbing the hill toward the bench-land where the ruined portion of Old Town lies hidden in the thickets of mesquite when Hurlburt asked:

"Where do they cut across the range?"

"If I knew that," Curt answered, "I'd go and lay for 'em on the other side. But I never got more'n a hundred yards fu'ther up that gulch than the place where you was laid out."

"Why?" Hurlburt demanded. "What stopped you?"

"Bullets," the old-timer told him quietly, "and they was cuttin' clost. Somebody was shootin' from away above me; and I never did like to make a target outa myself without I got a chancet to throw a little lead at the other feller. So I give that up. 'Twas the day of the ropin'-contest, along in the afternoon, when I took that little *pasear;* and I come back mighty glad that I hadn't any holes in my hide. But the's a hole in that mountain som'eres, and I'd sure give a heap to know just where it is." He halted and laid his hand on his friend's arm and lowered his voice.

"Tracks! That's all I've got, but they tell the story. From Chiracajon by the way we came, to here. Then burro tracks. A good trail right up the gulch. And then the bullets stopped me. But you can figger out the rest. They get through the mountain some way, and cross the line." He swore under his breath. "The pore ol' fool! Lets these gun-runners get him on the hip, and has got to protect 'em against his own men when they go to bootleggin' and robbin' trains. Well, here's where the auto-tracks end. The pack-trail comes out of the mesquite straight ahead of us. What say we foller it a little ways and lay for 'em? They'll be comin', directly."

THEY followed the narrow path through the bear-grass into the mesquite, and halted near the edge of the thicket where the trail took a sharp turn to the right.

"We can ambush 'em here," Curt whispered. "Remember, if they put up a fight, the's a good ol' sayin'—always shoot low in the dark."

They settled down on their bellies in a deep shadow. The moon was high in the heavens, and its rays filtered through the lace-work of foliage, leaving patterns of liquid brightness, with here and there a great pool all shining white among the black patches. The night wind was making little stirring whisperings in the *sacaton* out on the flat. Far above their heads they could hear it talking to the rocks which frowned down on the ruins of Old Town. The odor of the afternoon's rain was still coming up from the warm earth. . . . . Somewhere among the bushes a bit of steel clinked musically.

"Coming!" Curt whispered.

They lay as silent as the shadow which was hiding them and harkened for another sound. Gradually there emerged from the dark the scuffling of hoofs, the jingle of pack-trappings, and some one swore in a hushed voice. A man came forth into a long rift of light, as silent as a ghost; the soft moonbeams bathed the barrel of the rifle which he was carrying under his arm. He paused, as if uncertain, turning his head slowly as he looked from side to side. Then he came on again, and two others slipped forth from the night behind him. Their burnished weapons glistened, and once, as they roved, the eyes of the last one seemed to flame for an instant, reflecting the radiance which came down on them from above.

The scuffle of hoofs grew louder, and four little burros passed into the lighted area, nodding their heads as they dog-trotted onward. The rawhide pack-sacks flapped beside their flanks. A fourth man walked behind the last animal, and the tiny spot of red which his burnished cigarette made in the darkness betrayed his presence long before his form was visible. Hurlburt recognized the half-breed with the close-set eyes.

"Hands up!" Curt called beside him. "We're officers."

Then action came so swiftly within that shimmering lake of moonlight that, when he reconstructed the scene afterward, Hurlburt was never able to arrange in their sequence the things that he had seen. He had a confused vision of the burros leaping this way and that, colliding with one another, doubling like rabbits in their tracks, of men crouching among them, their faces all distorted with fierce excitement. In the next instant men and animals had vanished, and a thin mist of dust hovered over the spot where they had been. A pallid flash reached at him from the darkness, and reaching, vanished as if the night had soaked it up. He heard the brittle report of a smokeless powder cartridge, and almost at the same time, Curt's rifle went off beside him.

STILLNESS returned. The dust was settling in the moonlight. Other than that, there was no sign that anyone had ever moved near by. The night wind resumed its whispering. Time passed—seconds, perhaps, or perhaps it was minutes—and Hurlburt heard the bushes crack.

"Always shoot low in the dark." He thought of the old proverb as his finger was squeezing down on the trigger and he lowered the carbine's muzzle as he fired. A burro squealed; he heard the scuffling of hoofs as the little animal tore at the earth in its death-convulsion. And a feeling of self-reproach came over him as if he had caught himself at a bit of wanton cruelty.

Another interval of silence followed. Hurlburt lifted his head slowly to listen. Something stirred beside his cheek and whispered fiercely to him as it passed. The report of the rifle never registered itself on his senses; he was concentrating every faculty on swinging the muzzle of his own weapon toward the place where he had seen the flash. Almost as he pulled the trigger, there came from the shadows over there a gusty cry.

"Got one," Curt whispered. "Good shootin', son." And now, somehow, he felt none of that pity which had owned him when the burro squealed.

With such intervals of stillness, broken by an occasional shot, the fighting went on. There was something in the lulls which seemed to Hurlburt unbearable, a tedium of waiting for the darkness to give forth any sign of lurking enemies, a constant sensation of being watched by unseen eyes, of invisible rifles hanging poised as the muzzles pointed toward him. At first it impressed him vaguely, and he could not understand the reason for his sudden fear.

Yet he felt the presence of something overhead, something that seemed to be swooping down upon him, inaudible as a hawk that drops upon a rabbit. Of a sudden the darkness about him dissolved, and he saw every little object standing out.

A shaft of hard light settled over him, flowing straight athwart his body. Ahead of him, its outer edge cut the darkness sharply; beyond that rigid limit the blackness was absolute.

"Jump!"

He heard Curt's shout, and as he leaped back, the blackness before him was cut by flashes; spurts of dust rose where he had been lying; and the venomous flat voices of the rifles clamored after him. He gained his feet and rather threw himself than ran, and when he found the night enwrapping him again, he saw the shaft of light moving slowly to and fro like a giant tentacle feeling blindly for its prey. Away back where it came from, two yellow headlights gleamed; he heard the drumming of a motor.

"Down," Curt called, but as he dropped, the brightness was bathing him once more. The rifles spattered lead about him from the thickets. He saw the old-timer running, bent double, and he followed until the darkness hid his form.

Somewhere near by his name was whispered. He felt his way to the sound, and Curt laid a hand on his shoulder.

"They got us foul. Drop now, and crawl for it."

They crept on their hands and knees, hugging the ground with their bodies, and as they went, they watched the light-shaft searching for them among the thickets which they had left a moment before. Thus for a hundred yards or so as fast as they could force the awkward pace, and then they halted. The blood was pounding in Hurlburt's head; his breath was coming in deep gasps. He half rose to his knees.

"What now?" he asked.

"Back-track to our car. The's a little arroyo runs down there through the beargrass. It'll give us cover, chances are." The old-timer halted and sobbed for breath. When he had regained it, "It's our turn, then. Come on."

THEY found the shallow wash in the moonlight at the edge of the thicket and crept down its bed, wriggling like lizards over the rocks, and as they were making their way slowly, hugging the earth, they saw the searchlight weaving back and forth exactly as Hurlburt had seen the rattlesnake weaving its head a few hours before. It was slow going, and what with the cactus and niggerheads, there were times when it took all of the young man's efforts at self-repression to keep from rising to his feet. At last they reached the mesquite where the land broke toward the plain, and were able to walk under the shelter of the great shrubs.

"Fast as you can," Curt ordered, but it was a good half-hour from the time when they had found the arroyo before they reached the little car.

"Now," the old-timer said grimly, "my searchlight's got anything in Chiracajon County skinned. We'll give 'em a taste of what they handed us."

The self-starter was whining before he had finished, and the engine growled in low. A few moments later they were climbing the grade, and when they reached the summit, they saw the car in the middle of the road ahead of them. But there was no sign of anyone about it. They advanced upon it cautiously, fearing ambush, and finally came up to it. It was empty. The tracks of men and burros showed on all sides in the sand.

"Got clean away." Curt stopped to curse. "And took the stuff with 'em! I reckon they're halfway acrost the mountain by now."

Hurlburt said nothing. He was staring at the Sheriff's old car. The yellow headlights glistened dully in the moonlight.

"Come on!" Curt seized his arm. "Mebbe we can head 'em off at Najo yet before they cross the line."

CHAPTER XVI

CHARIS HILTON was sitting on the wide veranda of the Sheriff's house late that evening when Doud's car stopped before the gate. She watched her uncle coming up the pathway; it seemed to her as if his shoulders drooped; his face was drawn. He did not even pause to greet her, but hurried into the hallway, and she heard him take down the telephone receiver.

"Get Ed Hurlburt located for me as quick's you can," he told the operator. He hung up, and the sound of his footsteps told her that he was pacing back

and forth while he waited. She rose and went inside.

"Well, honey, have a good ride?" he asked her as she confronted him.

She made no answer. His face was almost haggard, and his lips persisted in remaining tight as he tried to smile.

"I heard you asking for Mr. Hurlburt," she said. "He left here to look for you early this evening." She was searching his eyes as she spoke, but the lids curtained them before she had finished her announcement. Then, abruptly, the lids opened, and now it was his eyes that searched hers.

"What's on?" His voice was dry.

"I rode with him to Old Town." She was having a hard time of it to get the words out, not so much because of the confession as because of the revelation that was to follow, and she had a feeling of relief when the telephone-bell interrupted her. He strode over to the instrument and jerked the receiver from its hook. As he listened to the operator's news, his cheeks seemed to fade to a sort of putty gray.

"All right!" His voice sounded strange as he hung up, and now he was not looking at her at all, but staring at the floor.

"Curt Wilcox!" he muttered. "It's all off now. They went together!"

"Uncle!" she seized his arm. "What's wrong?"

HIS eyes came slowly back to her, and something like fierceness flickered in them for an instant. The light passed as swiftly as it had come.

"What happened in Old Town?" he asked; but before she could answer him, the telephone-bell sounded a second time. There was some delay in making the connections, as if this might be a long-distance call, but Doud stood as rigid as a graven image, waiting.

"Yes," he said finally, "this is Sheriff Doud. Najo? . . . . Oh, it's you. . . . . What say?" He drew a long, tight breath, and of a sudden his face took on a stealthy look. "Tell him to wait right where he is." Charis was waiting to begin her story, but he shook his head at her and started toward the door. Halfway down the hall, he paused.

"You say that Ed done started out to look for me?" he asked. She nodded mutely, and then, because of that queer unreasoning faculty which we call a woman's intuition, she said abruptly:

"They were talking to you of Mr. Hurlburt?" And without waiting for an answer she ran to the old-fashioned hatrack. As he was passing out through the front door, she gained his side, still slipping on her coat.

"There," he told her, "it's nothing serious. He aint hurt."

"I'm going too," she announced quietly.

He hesitated for a moment, and then followed her to the car, for she had not paid the slightest heed to him but had gone on as if he did not exist.

They were down the long hill and out on the mesquite flat before he spoke again, and then his voice was gentle.

"Tell me about Old Town."

SHE told the story just as the whole thing had taken place, and she watched him as she talked. Since she had come here, Doud had been very good to her in his careless way, and she knew that he held a genuine affection for her; that feeling had begotten its return from her. But now, when she watched his face and saw no sign of astonishment come into it, nor any sign of anger, but in their stead a strange slyness that went well with those lowered lids, she drew away from him.

"I'll fix 'em yet, honey," he told her when she had finished, and something halfway between a wink and a leer twisted his lean old features, "—only we get there in time!" And because she could not bear to look at him any longer, she stared at the mesquite bushes as they came racing toward them out of the dark and passed in never-ending mad procession into the shadows behind them. The Sheriff's lank body bent in an arc over the steering-wheel; his eyes remained fixed on the road before them, and so he did not see the aversion in her face. But when they came down the long winding grade into the Najo Mining Company's camp and stopped before the office building, she refused his helping hand and alighted without a word of thanks. Then he saw what she was thinking, and something like pain came into his eyes as the lids descended before them.

The little office was aglare with electric lights and full of men. As she entered, Charis got sight of Hurlburt's face; his head was back, and his eyes were filled with that pained anger which hurts when one sees it in the eyes of the young. He was seated in one of the office chairs, and Curt Wilcox was sitting beside him. Bol-

ton, the Najo Company's superintendent, nodded easily to Doud and took an involuntary step backward as he saw the girl. The Sheriff strode into the middle of the room.

"Well?" He made the word include the entire company.

Hurlburt looked him in the eyes without a word. Old Curt laughed unpleasantly. Bolton smiled, as he always smiled, which was as a man smiles who cherishes no illusions as to good intentions on the part of his fellow-men. " 'Twas I that phoned," he said, and interrupted himself to offer Charis a chair.

She shook her head and remained standing. Bolton went on in his clipped, cold voice.

"I don't know what the mix-up was. We're doing some work on the other side of the mountain, and I'd sent a gang of men after giant powder that one of your cars was to bring. A little more than half an hour ago I got word that they'd been ambushed and shot into. One of 'em was killed, a Yaqui laborer. The foreman recognized Hurlburt and phoned the news over from the power-house near Old Town. A little later these two came over the grade and demanded to search the camp. I'm willing to swear out warrants against 'em myself, if it's necessary; but one thing I do want, and that is to have 'em both taken away tonight before there's more trouble. These Yaquis of mine are getting sore, and Lord knows what they'll do."

CURT laughed again unpleasantly. Hurlburt started to speak, but the old-timer caught his eye and he forbore. Doud stood for a moment as if sleep had overcome him. And then, as one who talks in his dreams:

"All right," he said evenly. "You two'll have to come away, I guess." He turned his back on them and started for the door.

Charis saw Hurlburt and Curt exchanging looks as they rose to follow. There was in that glance a mingling of anger and disgust. The deputy sheriff passed within a foot of her, and their eyes met; and she felt the pain that was tearing at his heart.

"My car," Doud said.

The pair got in without a word, and Charis took her place beside the Sheriff on the driver's seat. When they had climbed halfway up the grade and were out of sight from the town, Curt Wilcox drawled:

"I reckon, you're satisfied to get us away from Najo, Doud? Or do you aim to lock us up for makin' trouble for your gun-runners?"

"There's a path takes off down the hill here," the Sheriff said irrelevantly, and stopped the car.

"Charis," he went on, "you'll have to stick right here." He turned half round, addressing the rear seat: "You two will please keep your mouths shut a little while. Mebbe I can straighten this business out yet. Now come along with me." His voice was stern, and yet somehow there was an odd note of pleading mingled with the command.

Those were the last words the girl heard before they vanished in the darkness down the mountainside. As she sat there waiting for what seemed to her many hours, they brought her comfort. She felt that after all there might be hope.

THE path which they traveled was a cut-off between the long loops of the road. They reached the town and passed on through it, keeping to the shadows, avoiding the lighted places until they reached the shaft-house at the bottom of the hill where Hurlburt had seen that car stop, the first afternoon. Bob O'Donnel appeared out of the darkness.

"All quiet so far," he whispered. "Bolton just came."

They saw a light gleaming through the dusty window of the shaft-house just ahead of them. "Wait till I give you the word, and then if the's shootin'," the Sheriff bade them, "why, cut loose; and you needn't worry about warrants this time, either."

A car was standing in the roadway just below the building; and as they sank down in the shadow, a figure appeared before the window. It was Bolton. The Sheriff chuckled. Some minutes passed. They could see the cable gleaming in the shine of the incandescent lamps. Now it began to move. The twisted strands slipped up and up past the window. Outside here, the watchers could hear one another breathing as the cage flashed into sight. Doud rose and glided down the hill to the shaft-house door.

And then from where he was lying Hurlburt saw the men who had come out of the mine's depths as they stepped into the little room. His eyes lit on a number of wooden boxes ranged in a neat pile on the elevator floor; he had bought many cartridges in his

day, and he recognized those cases at once. The Mexican with the military mustache and the half-breed with the closely set eyes were standing side by side; another specimen of border riffraff hid the fourth of the cage's passengers, to whom Bolton was talking earnestly. Abruptly this fourth man stepped to the door and flung it open. It was Bert Lewis. He stood there in the doorway confronting his senior partner, and Dan Doud's voice was hard as he spoke.

"Three men's got you covered through the window. I want the hull bunch of you."

Hurlburt saw Lewis' face go tight and gray; then Doud called him over to help handcuff the prisoners, and he was busy with the two Mexicans when he heard a scuffle. He turned in time to see Lewis diving under the muzzle of the Sheriff's weapon.

The man vanished at once into the outer darkness. Doud's pistol flamed. Down the road a self-starter shrieked. The red touring-car leaped forward. Its headlights came on, then wheeled in a wide arc, sweeping downward like a pair of drunken comets. Out of the depths came an awful crash.

Old Curt was first to the wreck, and called out the news:

"Dead, Dan; the car's on top of him." And Doud's voice was steady as he answered:

"Better that than jail."

CHAPTER XVII

SHERIFF DAN DOUD told his niece the tale as he drove homeward that night. And often while he was reciting the facts which have been missing thus far in this narrative, she saw his eyes go shut; sometimes he let one hand tend the steering-wheel, and gently stroked her sleeve with the other. The odorous night-wind hummed in their ears; out of the blackness, mesquite shrubs appeared, racing toward them in endless succession, disappearing in their wake.

"Bolton and that Mex officer have told all they know," the Sheriff began. "The both of 'em were against the train-robbery from the start. It was like this:

"Long ago I suspected Bolton was runnin' guns and ca'tridges acrost the line. Then he begun to pester me to name that half-breed as deputy in Najo—a beef-killer and bootlegger and worse. One day I got word from a party that looks out for me over there that the tunnel at the six-hundred-foot level had struck right spang into one of the company's old workings from the Old Town side, and that Bolton was keepin' the thing quiet. That made me pretty sure. A hole right through the mountain, and no one allowed to know about it!

"Well, profits had been pilin' up from the hardware business mighty swift, and Bert Lewis was makin' night trips to Najo. I didn't like to think that my pardner—and the son of my old friend—was in such a deal, but it looked mighty bad. Just at that time along comes Ed Hurlburt, saying that Bolton's hollering louder than ever for his deputy. I started out that evenin' to investigate, leavin' Ed to fetch you over from the Junction.

"Got back to Chiracajon in time to hear of the robbery. It come to me right away that it would be this gun-runnin' bunch, as like as not. I lit out, and saw Ed's car ahead of me. I didn't want to have him or anybody else with me just then—I wanted to handle the case so's to keep the gun-runnin' end of it quiet—if 'twas that bunch.

"I had an idee they'd head for Old Town if it was them, makin' for that hole in the mountain, you see. And sure enough, after I'd got there, here comes Ed and Curt and the cowboys on their trail. That made me plumb sure that my suspicions was correct, and when Ed told me how he'd seen the half-breed ahead of him on the road that afternoon, and talked about a shortcut, I done my best to steer him and ol' Curt off.

"From that time I worked hard. My aim was to ketch the bunch at gun-runnin', to take Bert Lewis down to the line and kick him acrost into Mexico, and to give the others their choice of pleadin' guilty—which would prevent any evidence from comin' out in co't—or of bein' turned over to the Mex authorities, who would line 'em up against a wall and shoot 'em.

"The night before the ropin'-contest I was follerin' Bert Lewis, and I'd trailed him to the gulch that leads to the old shaft which connects up with the workin's on the Najo side of the hill. But when I went on up the cañon after him, I found Ed ahead of me. The gang jumped him not fifty feet away from me, and I got sight of Lewis among 'em. Before I could do anything, here comes Curt Wilcox be-

hind me; and I dursen't show myself, not knowin' who he was. No evidence on earth could have cleared my name, you see, if it had come out that me and Bert Lewis was in that gulch with them gun-runners.

"That's the reason things went the way they did. And tonight I had gone over to Najo with Bob O'Donnel, havin' learned there was a shipment of ca'tridges comin' through the mine. I aimed to nail the crowd. But they failed to show up at the time we was told they would, and I left Bob and came back to town to try and get holt of Ed to help us, for I'd promised him to let him in on the arrest. You heard what follered. I had to play foxy with Bolton so's to keep him thinkin' that they had the wool pulled over my eyes. And if you hadn't been along, I do believe old Curt would have jerked his gun on me.

"Well, it's all right now. Ed's gettin' Bolton's signed statement, and is pumpin' the Mex officer, and he'll be back before mornin'. And Bert is dead—which is the best thing for him. Besides, it leaves me in shape to lie about it to his folks and make them think he was killed a-chasin' bandits. All right now, honey, aint it?"

She reached up her little hand and stroked his grizzled cheek.

"Yes," she said softly, "it's all right."

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was a long time after the night of the arrest—in fact, the bandits had pleaded guilty and were on their way to the penitentiary, and Bolton had left the country—before Hurlburt learned from the editor of Chiracajon's daily paper how Bert Lewis was responsible for that item concerning a shake-up in the Sheriff's office. And that bit of knowledge cleared up the last of the mystery.

Now a good deal of water had run under the bridges by this time, and there was scarcely an evening when Hurlburt and Charis were not together on the Sheriff's porch—or else out riding. Everyone was taking their engagement for granted. But everyone was still anticipating. No word of love had yet been spoken between them.

"I tell you what it is," Sheriff Dan Doud said to Curt Wilcox on a cloudless evening some months after these two had become reconciled. "Young folks today aint got what I call get-up-and-get. Look at them two a-setting there on my front porch. In my day a feller that would take as long's Ed Hurlburt has in askin' a girl to marry him would be left at the post." He said it with deep scorn, and there was scorn in Curt's voice as he agreed—which was, when you come to consider it, somewhat remarkable, inasmuch as both of these old-timers had spent their lives outside the bonds of wedlock.

Then Curt and the Sheriff climbed into the latter's car and went on downtown, still holding Ed Hurlburt in cheap esteem so far as his ability as a lovemaker went. And Hurlburt himself was beginning to think somewhat along the same lines. The trouble was that Charis had always been too companionable with him, too prone to meet him on his own ground and show how well she liked him. There is nothing more disconcerting to a would-be ardent wooer than honest, open regard on the part of a girl. Tonight he made up his mind to take a long chance anyhow, and hear her tell him, in answer to his declaration, how dear a friend she found him—how impossible it would be for him to show up as anything else.

THE moon was shining on the little grass-plot; the *olla* swayed to and fro in its hangings, and the gourd tapped its side at intervals with a faint musical sound; the thread of water glistened where it wound about the outskirts of the bit of lawn. And probably all of this helped him to take the hazard which he had been longing to take, yet dreading its results.

He plunged into it as abruptly as if it were a fight instead of a declaration. Charis had been talking of a ride which they were planning for the next Saturday afternoon, when he interrupted her.

"Charis, I—" He halted, realizing his precipitancy. He was leaning toward her in his chair. She was looking at him in that way she had, from the side of her eyes; but now there was no subdued mirth in her look. Something else shone there.

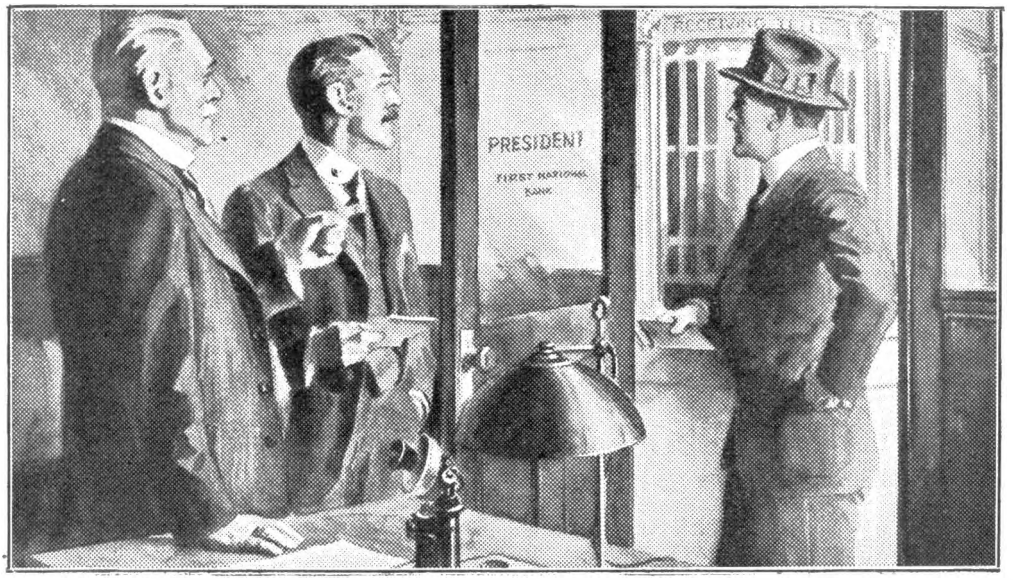
"I love you," he said softly.

She was silent for what seemed to him like a long time. Then he found her gaze meeting his, and before he spoke, he read her answer there. . . . .

It was getting late when Sheriff Doud returned from downtown in his car, and they told him how matters lay. He uttered a scornful: "Humph!

"Thought 'twas pretty nigh time you got your nerve up, Ed," said he.

THE END



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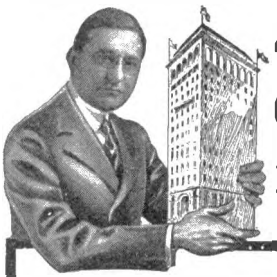

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